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PERSPECTIVE

Inner growth begins where external noise ends.

Assam CM launches scheme providing Rs 1,000-2,000 monthly to male students

GUWAHATI
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday introduced a new financial support programme for students pursuing higher education in the state.

Addressing the media, he said the scheme will come into effect from February 1, with eligible male students receiving monthly assistance directly into their bank accounts.

As per the announcement, male students enrolled in undergraduate courses will get Rs 1,000 per month, while those studying at the postgraduate level will receive Rs 2,000 every month.

The government said the move is intended to reduce financial pressure on students and help them concentrate better on their studies.

Students will not qualify for the benefit if their parents are government employees or if the family's annual income exceeds Rs 4 lakh.

The scheme is an extension of the state government's ongoing efforts to support education.

Similar initiatives have earlier been launched for female students, including monthly incentives for HSLC candidates and financial assistance for girls from higher secondary to postgraduate levels under programmes such as Nijut Moina, aimed at improving education and discouraging child marriage.

WHO SAID WHAT



Happy New Year! 2026 will be a banger
~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur

“Will push them back within a week of being declared foreigner:” Assam CM

GUWAHATI
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that the state government will push back a person within one week of being declared a foreigner by the tribunal.

Addressing a press conference, the Assam CM said that the government has identified and pushed back 2000 foreign nationals.

He said, “We have intensified pushback efforts. From now on, within one week of someone being declared a foreigner by the Foreigners’ Tribunal, we will push them back. We have identified 2000 illegal foreigners and pushed them back.”

The Foreigners’ Tribunal in Assam handles cases involving immigrants and foreign nationals.

In line with this policy, CM Sarma, on December 25, had said that the state government has adopted a policy of “direct action with no compromise” against illegal immigrants, instructing district administrations to issue immediate expulsion orders wherever warranted.

Further, speaking to reporters, Himanta Biswa Sarma lauded the state’s law and order situation, claiming that the number of cases has declined and the conviction rate has risen.

He said, “As per the Ministry of Home Affairs, Assam has ranked 1st among all States in the implementation of the New Criminal Laws. 1.33 lakh cases were registered in 2021, and it has now reduced to 43,748 cases in 2025. Chargesheet filing before the court has increased by 81 per cent. In 2021, the conviction rate was 6 per cent; now it has increased to 26.38 per cent.”



He also announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of the 32-km Kaziranga elevated corridor in January and the foundation stone of the proposed Gelephu railway line project in February.

The Chief Minister said, “In the last five years in the infrastructure sector, lots of work has been done. Four new bridges over the Brahmaputra River are under construction.

We will open the Guwahati-North Guwahati connecting bridge in February. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of a 32-km (total nearly 34 km) Kaziranga elevated corridor with an estimated cost of Rs 6857 crore on January 17 or 18.”

“Twin tube under water tunnel connecting Gohpur to Numaligarh will be road cum rail Rs 22,000 crore, and the Finance Ministry has approved it. In February, PM Modi will lay the foundation stone of the proposed Gelephu railway line project,” he added.

they mature. A major breakthrough in recent months, officials said, came with the identification and disruption of the Imam Mahmud Kafilah (IMK) module, a Bangladesh-based extremist outfit that has allegedly been attempting to expand its footprint in Assam. Acting on intelligence inputs, the Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police has arrested at least 11 members linked to the group.

The IMK is described by security agencies as an offshoot of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a proscribed terrorist organisation in India. The group was founded in 2018 by Jewel Mahmud, also known as Imam Mahmud Habibullah or Sohail, a former JMB member who claims to be the “Amir” of IMK. Investigators say the organisation openly propagates the ideology of “Ghazwatul Hind,” a narrative centred on violent jihad in the Indian subcontinent.

Sources revealed that the situation became more volatile following political changes in Bangladesh in August 2024. After the regime change, senior leaders of banned outfits such as JMB, Ansarul-Bangla Team (ABT) and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) are believed to have issued directions to IMK leadership to activate dormant modules and expand their presence in India.

“As part of this strategy, Bangladeshis Umar and Khalid were tasked with coordinating IMK’s activities in Assam,” a police source said. The Assam cell of the organisation was allegedly headed by Nasim Uddin, also known as Tammim, a resident of Barpeta Road.

Investigations have revealed that the group’s operations are largely coordinated through encrypted and secure social media platforms. One such online group, titled Purba Akash, has emerged as a key communication, recruitment and indoctrination channel. Through this platform, individuals based in Assam, West Bengal and Tripura were allegedly radicalised, recruited and financially mobilised.

Police sources said the network included individuals holding Indian passports, some of whom had previously travelled to Bangladesh, as well as known former members of proscribed extremist organisations. The IMK projects itself as a Ghazwatul Hind-centric module and aligns its propaganda closely with the ideology of transnational jihadi outfits.

Officials noted that following the change of government in Bangladesh, cadres of JMB, ABT and AQIS were either released or emboldened, leading to a revival of their ideological influence and cross-border networks. This resurgence, they said, has directly benefited IMK-linked platforms, which act as conduits for extremist messaging in India.

According to the police, IMK systematically disseminates propaganda advocating violent jihad and the armed conquest of India through digital means. Dedicated websites, online publications and social media accounts are used to circulate ideological material under the banner of Ghazwatul Hind.

Investigators have also recovered radical literature authored by IMK leadership, including titles such as Sarbohroum Khamatar Malik Allah and Ghazwatul Hind er Sonkhip-to-Alochona. These materials are circulated among cadres and sympathisers through online channels to reinforce extremist beliefs and justify violence.

In Assam, such content was allegedly shared extensively within the encrypted Purba Akash group. Police said the group followed a structured and multi-layered process to radicalise and recruit followers.

“Potential recruits are first identified through online jihadist forums and channels,” a source explained. “They are then fed IMK propaganda in the form of books, lectures and discussions, and monitored in secure groups.”

To formally join the organisation, recruits are required to take a bayat, or pledge of allegiance, to IMK’s Amir, Imam Mahmud Habibullah. The process is said to be highly controlled and ritualised. Each recruit must submit personal details and identity proof on a prescribed form and then record a video of the oath.

This oath video is first sent to an “Indian Zimmedar” or responsible cadre, who forwards it to the Amir in Bangladesh for verification and acceptance. Only after this authentication process are recruits formally inducted into the organisation.

Police said this method has led to the radicalisation of several youths in Assam, particularly in Barpeta and Chirang districts, as well as in parts of West Bengal. Officials warned that the emphasis on secrecy and loyalty makes detection more difficult at early stages.

Jihadi outfits seeking foothold in Assam, security agencies step up vigilance

GUWAHATI
Security agencies in Assam are on heightened alert amid growing concerns that jihadi outfits are attempting to establish an organised network in the State, using border vulnerabilities and digital platforms to radicalise, recruit and mobilise youths for extremist activities.

Police sources told despite periodic arrests of suspected operatives, anti-national forces continue to make concerted efforts to plant roots in Assam and adjoining regions. Intelligence inputs suggest that these groups view Assam and other states sharing an international border with Bangladesh as a strategic entry point into India, from where operatives can fan out to other parts of the country.

According to officials, the long-term objective of these organisations is to build sleeper cells and logistical networks capable of carrying out acts of sabotage. “Police and security agencies are on their toes,” a senior source said, adding that Assam Police is working in close coordination with central intelligence agencies to track emerging threats and dismantle networks before

they mature. A major breakthrough in recent months, officials said, came with the identification and disruption of the Imam Mahmud Kafilah (IMK) module, a Bangladesh-based extremist outfit that has allegedly been attempting to expand its footprint in Assam. Acting on intelligence inputs, the Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police has arrested at least 11 members linked to the group.

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He said preparatory work would begin shortly, with the radar expected to be installed within the next three months.

Highlighting the state’s exposure to diverse and recurrent weather hazards, Dr Mohapatra said Tripura faces frequent urban flooding during the monsoon, cloudbursts, landslides and mudslides, cyclones originating in the Bay of Bengal during pre- and post-monsoon periods, nor’westers, cold waves, fog and heatwaves.

IMD Bolsters Tripura’s Disaster Preparedness with New X-Band Doppler Weather Radar

AGARTALA

In a major step towards strengthening disaster preparedness and improving real-time weather forecasting, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is expanding its meteorological infrastructure in Tripura with the installation of a state-of-the-art X-Band Doppler Weather Radar and the integration of additional Automated Weather Stations (AWS) into its national observation network.

On Wednesday, the IMD, led by Director General of Meteorology Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, and the Government of Tripura formally exchanged land lease documents for the installation of the advanced Doppler Weather Radar. The ceremony was held at the TIFT Conference Room in Agartala in the presence of Tripura Chief Minister Dr Manik Saha and senior state and IMD officials.

As part of the broader initiative to enhance weather monitoring and disaster risk reduction, three Automated Weather Stations were also officially handed over to the IMD for integration into its national grid. Officials said the expansion would significantly strengthen Tripura’s capacity for flood forecasting, early warning dissemination and water resource management.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Mohapatra announced that a second advanced Doppler Weather Radar would be installed at Belonia subdivision in south Tripura.

He said preparatory work would begin shortly, with the radar expected to be installed within the next three months.

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“Keeping these challenges in mind, IMD has decided to strengthen the entire meteorological observation network in Tripura,” he said. “We are making concerted efforts to install automatic rain gauges, automated weather stations and advanced instruments such as wind profilers to improve the accuracy and timeliness of forecasts.”

Officials said Tripura currently has 34 rain gauges used for district-level rainfall monitoring. From 2025 onwards, IMD has also begun block-level rainfall monitoring across the state to enable more localised and actionable forecasts. At present, Tripura has 28 Automated Weather Stations, with plans in place to install 14 more in the near future.

Dr Mohapatra noted that over the past decade, the role of IMD’s meteorological centre in Tripura has expanded well beyond aviation services to support sectors such as agriculture, disaster man-

agement and public safety. He said forecast accuracy in the region has improved substantially over the years, rising from about 40 per cent a decade ago.

“IMD is now moving towards Panchayat-level forecasting, which will provide much more precise and location-specific weather information,” he said. “This will be particularly beneficial for farmers, disaster management authorities and local administrations.”

The high-resolution X-Band Doppler Weather Radar, with a coverage radius of approximately 100 kilometres, will enable accurate, real-time monitoring of heavy rainfall, thunderstorms, cyclones and other severe weather systems. Officials said the radar is expected to be installed and made operational before the upcoming pre-monsoon season, significantly improving early warning capabilities.

Once operational, the new radar will become the second Doppler Weather Radar in Tripura, supplementing the existing system at Agartala Airport, which has been in operation since 2011.

The event was attended by Revenue Secretary Brijesh Pandey, Dr Partha Roy, Head of the Meteorological Centre in Agartala, and other senior officials from the state government and the IMD, underscoring the joint commitment to strengthening Tripura’s resilience against weather-related disasters.

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INDIA'S ECONOMY IN 2025

Multiple shocks over the past five years have brought increased global volatility and uncertainty. 2025 has been marked by geopolitical fragmentation, trade uncertainty, supply chain realignments, and a battle for technological supremacy. Amidst this unsettled global environment, India's macroeconomic stability stands out. Growth came in at 8.2% in the latest quarter, surpassing even the most optimistic estimates. Inflation is low, and the fiscal deficit manageable. In the backdrop of multiple external shocks, India's policy has consistently been to strengthen domestic economic resilience.

The bedrock for any stable economy is domestic demand. For the millions of India's households, tax policy plays an important role in stimulating consumption. India has seen both direct and indirect tax reforms this year. In February, the Budget put more money in people's hands by effectively making salaries up to Rs. 12 lakh tax-free. The complex Income-tax Act of 1961 has been simplified by the Income Tax Act, 2025. Then, in September, reforms to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) introduced a two-slab structure and simplified governance. Consumer sentiment has soared, with festive-period sales reaching Rs. 6 trillion. Importantly, these moves are not revenue losses. By spurring consumption and growth, tax collections stand to be higher in coming years, reflecting their impact on price elasticity of demand. Domestic consumption constitutes 55-60% of our economy. As consumption increases, so does capacity utilisation. As production reaches capacity, it triggers a fresh wave of investment in the economy, which, in turn, generates its own multiplier effects.

Consumer demand will be only sustainable if supported by durable income growth, which reforms to labour laws will ensure. By consolidating 29 fragmented laws into four modern codes, India's labour framework is more transparent for businesses and more secure for workers. The focus is on fair wages, stronger industrial relations, social security, and workforce safety. These laws will ensure that our growing 640 million-strong workforce prospers and drives India's growth story forward.

As household incomes rise, they have a choice between higher consumption or savings, or both. As formal employment rises, contributions to provident, pension, and insurance funds will increase. Importantly, globally, such funds are an essential source of capital in domestic capital markets, as they invest in debt and equity in companies, projects, or government bonds. Allowing 100% FDI in insurance will deepen India's capital markets, enhance competition and the quality of service. Raising FDI limits in insurance is both a financial sector reform and an enabler of social security.

Along with a stimulus to investment through demand, the investment climate has also eased considerably this year. The GST reforms were not just rate rationalisations; they have also significantly eased the registration and compliance process. There has been a 90% reduction in registration time from 30 to 3 days for small firms. The Securities Markets Code will strengthen governance of India's capital markets, enhance consumer protection, and reduce the compliance burden. Independent regulators are also facilitating growth. The RBI, for instance, has consolidated 9,000+ circulars into less than 250. Similarly, the IRDAI has constituted a committee to suggest regulatory reforms in the insurance sector.

Environmental and building codes have also undergone reforms, moving to a risk-based system of compliance rather than a uniform one. For instance, moving away from a uniform 33% green cover will free up 1.2 lakh hectares of industrial land. Units located in industrial parks with comprehensive environmental clearances will no longer require separate clearances. A newly created 'white category' of industries, will reduce compliance costs for low-risk sectors, while freeing up pollution control board resources for higher-polluting, higher-risk sectors.

The Jan Vishwas reforms decriminalised over 200 minor offences and scrapped hundreds of outdated laws. Furthermore, many state governments have also come together to decriminalise over 1000 offences. States have also instituted reforms in land, environmental clearances, and construction, allowing faster project clearances. The next step of Jan Vishwas is now in the offing. These moves represent an important signal: that India is moving towards a trust-based economy, rather than a control-based one.

Despite the surrounding volatility and uncertainty, trade will remain crucial to our growth aspirations. In the Monsoon Session, the Parliament modernised India's maritime governance by replacing the Acts of 1908, 1925, and 1958. With these reforms, India's maritime governance framework aligns with global standards. Reducing documentary requirements and strengthening governance will lower logistics costs, enhancing India's competitiveness. Second, the removal of over 200 quality control orders (QCOs) has lifted a significant burden off MSMEs and exporters. At the same time, we have also opened new markets for our exporters through trade deals with the UK, New Zealand, and Oman, as well as the operationalisation of the agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Jobs and exports come from scaled firms. For too long, policy encouraged firms to stay small. Staying small meant that firms were unable to reap the benefits of economies of scale. Now, for the second time in five years, MSME thresholds have been revised upwards. Compared to the pre-2020 definition, the thresholds have grown 10x. Raising these thresholds enables firms to grow whilst retaining government support. A new export promotion mission worth Rs. 20,000 crores will support export growth, especially for MSMEs.

Energy consumption is seeing a massive spike as artificial intelligence (AI) and the associated infrastructure, such as data centres, are seeing increased uptake and investment. In the past few days, India has attracted USD 70 bn worth of investments in this space. Nuclear energy can help power these innovations sustainably. In the Winter Session, the Parliament enacted the SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India) Bill. The signal is tectonic, as India is voluntarily moving away from its state-monopoly model toward a safety-first, investment-friendly regime. The law allows for private and foreign participation in civilian nuclear projects, whilst keeping elements such as fuel, enrichment, reprocessing and weapons under the government's domain.

Reforms have not just been limited to economic sectors. Rural employment law reform raises the minimum guarantee from 100 to 125 days. The new law shifts focus from relief to productive rural employment, linking wage work to durable assets, water security, climate resilience and livelihood infrastructure. Education sees a major reform with the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Act, which establishes a single, unified higher education regulator by replacing multiple overlapping bodies (UGC, AICTE, NCTE). This move aligns fully with the National Education Policy (NEP) and separates regulation from funding to ensure a stronger focus on quality.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Don't let your bad days trick you into thinking you have a bad life." - Allie Newman

Rupee Decline May Not Be Bad For Economy Now



NANTOO BANERJEE

It does not make sense for India to deplete its hard-earned foreign currency reserves to temporarily protect the Rupee's exchange value. In fact, Indian Rupee's downturn vis-à-vis other major currencies has not adversely impacted the country's impressive economic growth, at least for the present. On the contrary, it has made exports cheaper and imports dearer. This should help the country reduce its overall large annual trade deficits although increasing imports of cheap non-essential items from China continues to be a major concern. The country's export growth in 2025 shows positive momentum, with significant year-on-year jumps in late 2025, particularly in November, reaching nearly 20 percent for merchandise, driven by key sectors like electronics, agricultural products, and services, despite some global trade challenges, leading to cumulative growth of over five percent for the April-November period. India should not be too concerned about its Rupee exchange-rate fall as long as it does not hurt the economic growth.

India's central bank intervened aggressively in currency markets during December, selling dollars to prop up the rupee, echoing its earlier heavy-handed efforts to stem a one-way decline in the currency rate. The rupee rallied to an intraday high of 89.75 against the US dollar on the interbank order matching system, from near 91.00 seen prior to the intervention. It was last trading at 90.28. The Indian Rupee's downturn has outpaced the US Dollar's own decline since April, 2025. In October, the RBI sold a net \$11.9 billion to support the Rupee. As in the past, it proved to be only temporarily effective. The RBI intervention has failed to arrest the Rupee's decline. The exchange value of INR in 2025 showed a much bigger loss to other major global currencies

such as EURO (21 percent), Pound Sterling, Australian \$, Japanese Yen, and UAE's Dirham than US\$. It may be time for Indian exporters to seriously try to tap these markets to push Indian goods and services while containing higher priced (in Rupee) non-essential imports.

At the same time, it must be appreciated that the RBI has been trying to continuously bolster India's foreign exchange reserves which saw a significant increase of \$1.68 billion, reaching \$688.94 billion, in the third week of December. It was primarily driven by higher gold holdings and a modest rise in foreign currency assets. The country's gold reserves strengthened considerably, reflecting a diversification strategy. Special Drawing Rights (SDR) and the IMF reserve position also saw slight upticks. As of last September, the RBI held approximately 880 tonnes of gold, with a significant portion (around 575.8 tonnes) now stored domestically in India — marking a major shift towards onshoring reserves — while about 290.3 tonnes remain with the Bank of England (BoE) and Bank of International Settlements (BIS). This increased domestic storage reflects a strategic move to secure assets amid global financial uncertainties, with the RBI bringing back 274 tonnes since March 2023.

The massive hot money outflow from the Indian market during the year is principally responsible for the decline of INR's exchange value by over six percent against US\$. Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have sold Indian equities worth over Rs 14,000 crore so far in December, taking total outflows in 2025 to Rs 1,57,860 crore. This is more than 50 percent of their total investment in the Indian market. There is nothing unusual for such a large hot money movement although globally big hot money outflows often lead to devaluation of domestic currency. They could also cause

inflation and hurt financial stability by disrupting local credit markets. Fortunately, the continuous hot money outflow from the Indian market through 2025 failed to disrupt the country's economy and the stock market. The hot money exit failed to create much market volatility in India. Notably, the country's current inflation level is among the lowest in recent memory. The reasons are good enough for the RBI not to deplete its foreign reserves to temporarily protect the exchange value of Rupee. For now, the RBI would do well to protect its forex reserves and not become too concerned about protecting the Rupee.

Foreign investors may have pulled out billions from Indian markets in 2025, but domestic funds continue to push stocks higher. The year witnessed massive and consistent investment in the Indian stock market by domestic mutual funds, driven by strong and resilient Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) inflows from retail investors. This surge in domestic flows has been a key stabilizing force, often counterbalancing significant FPI outflows. Mutual funds have injected over Rs.400,000 crore into equities in 2025, with projections suggesting the total could surpass Rs.500,000 crore by the year-end. This marks the fifth consecutive year of positive net equity flows from domestic mutual funds. The exit of large foreign portfolio investments (FPI) or speculative capital from the market should not be a matter of concern for the economy.

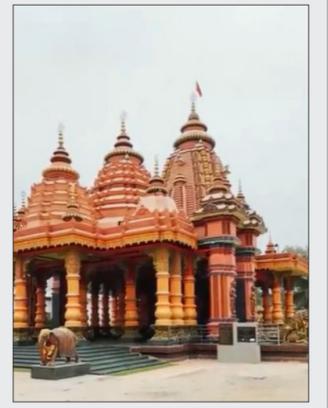
Instead, the government should go all out to attract long-term foreign direct investment (FDI) as it recently did in the case of 100 percent foreign equity in insurance. Despite the continuing good economic growth and high domestic consumption benefiting almost all foreign manufacturing and services companies in India, the net FDI inflow into the country continues to be weak. To give an example,

Apple Inc, a recent entrant with manufacturing facility, showed a strong growth in FY25, with revenue hitting around Rs.79,000 crore and net profit rising 16 percent to Rs.3,196 crore, driven by robust iPhone demand (especially iPhone 16/17 series),

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Mandirs are the heartbeat of our civilisation and we have taken every step to ensure that they thrive and guide us in our quest to be an Atmanirbhar and Viksit Assam. Listen to a devotee of Bijni's Laxhi Mandir on how our support has been key in developing the temple premises.

~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



increased local manufacturing ("Make in India"), and expanding retail footprint, solidifying India as a key market with record iPhone shipments and market share gains despite global slowdowns.

Yet, India witnessed a very low, even negative, rate of net FDI inflow in several months of the current year, meaning more FDI flowed out (repatriation/outward investment) than came in, despite good gross inflows, due to factors like high outflows, global uncertainty, and shifting investor sentiment. This contrasts with gross inflows which remained strong, but repatriation and Indian companies investing abroad significantly reduced the net figure, leading to sharp drops and negative months. A high rate of net FDI inflow will substantially help stabilise the exchange value of the INR.

Assam lines up bridges, tunnels and mega corridors as CM unveils next phase of infrastructure push

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday outlined a slate of major upcoming infrastructure projects across the state, highlighting bridges, tunnels, transport corridors, healthcare facilities and power projects planned or underway as part of what he described as a transformative push over the past five years.

Addressing the media on the first day of the new year, Sarma said four new bridges over the Brahmaputra are currently under construction, with the much-anticipated bridge connecting Guwahati and North Guwahati scheduled to be opened in February.

Among the flagship projects announced, the Chief Minister

said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to lay the foundation stone of the Kaziranga elevated corridor later this month. The 32-km corridor stretching to nearly 34 km in total length will be built at an estimated cost of Rs 6,957 crore and is aimed at easing traffic movement while protecting the ecologically sensitive landscape around Kaziranga.

Sarma also revealed that the Centre has approved the Rs 22,000-crore twin-tube underwater tunnel project connecting Gohpur and Numaligarh. The project, designed as a road-rail corridor beneath the Brahmaputra, is expected to significantly improve connectivity between Upper Assam and the north bank.

In another major boost to rail



infrastructure, the Chief Minister said the Prime Minister is likely to lay the foundation stone of the proposed Gelephu railway line project in February.

Focusing on urban connectivity, Sarma announced plans for an elevated corridor near the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati, along with the development of an Aerocity spread over 60 acres to support aviation-linked commercial and urban growth.

In the healthcare sector, the Chief Minister said the state government has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Asian Development Bank for the construction of a new, state-of-the-art hospital at Guwahati Medical College. The Rs 2,200-crore project will involve the complete demolition of the

existing structure and its replacement with a modern medical facility.

Sarma further said Assam will soon inaugurate the 120 MW Kopili hydroelectric project, marking a significant addition to the state's power generation capacity.

"These projects reflect the scale of work undertaken in the last five years and our commitment to transforming Assam's infrastructure," the Chief Minister said, adding that improved connectivity and public services remain central to the government's development agenda.

The announcements come amid heightened infrastructure activity in the state, with several projects expected to shape Assam's economic and urban landscape in the coming years.

Gaurav Gogoi Supports Northeast Students, Calls for Exemplary Punishment in Anjel Chakma Case

GUWAHATI

Assam Congress president and Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi on Tuesday voiced strong support for students from the Northeast who are planning a peaceful demonstration in Delhi, demanding justice for Anjel Chakma and his family.

Addressing the media, Gogoi said a large number of students, particularly from the Uttar Purvanchal and Northeastern regions, want to express their anguish through democratic and peaceful means. He said the Congress stands firmly with the students and has appealed to the authorities to respect their constitutional right to protest.

"Our demand is very clear - Anjel Chakma and his family must receive justice," Gogoi said. Drawing a comparison with existing legal safeguards, he pointed out that in India, the use of derogatory or abusive language against members of any caste attracts stringent legal punishment. "In the same way, racial misconduct or abuse directed at people from the Northeast must invite the strictest punishment," he asserted.

Gogoi stressed that incidents involving racial abuse and violence against people from the Northeast cannot be trivialised or treated as isolated episodes. He said such acts not only violate individual dignity but also undermine the constitutional promise of equality and fraternity.

The Congress leader said the case has raised serious concerns about the safety, dignity and sense of belonging of students from the Northeast who live and study in other parts of the country. Strong and swift legal action, he added, is necessary to ensure justice for the victims and to serve as a deterrent against similar incidents in the future.

Assam opposition seeks rehabilitation, compensation for Karbi Anglong violence victims

GUWAHATI

Opposition parties in Assam have urged the state government to prioritise the rehabilitation of families affected by the recent violence in West Karbi Anglong district, calling for comprehensive relief measures and accountability for the unrest. In a joint memorandum submitted to Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on December 31, leaders from the Congress, CPI(M), Rajar Dal, Assam Jatiya Parishad, the All Party Hill Leaders Conference and other opposition groups demanded adequate financial compensation for victims and the families of two people who lost their lives in the clashes.

The memorandum emphasised the need for livelihood restoration through employment opportunities, skill development programmes and access to short-term credit. It also called for the rebuilding of damaged community infrastructure, includ-

ing schools, roads and bridges, to help normalise life in the affected areas.

"Rehabilitation of the affected must be prioritised. Besides livelihood restoration through employment or skill development, priority access to short-term credit and loans, and the restoration of community infrastructure such as schools, roads and bridges should be ensured," the memorandum stated. The opposition further stressed that compensation should be extended to both tribal and non-tribal families for loss of life, injuries, livelihood disruption and damage to property.

The unrest in the Kheroni area of West Karbi Anglong reportedly erupted over tensions between Karbi and non-tribal residents linked to alleged encroachment of grazing reserve land. The violence left one person dead in police firing and another allegedly burned alive, while more than 180 people, including security personnel, were injured.

"All the villagers were involved": ASP Saikia on burning of couple in Karbi Anglong over witchcraft allegations

KARBI ANGLONG

According to the initial information, "all the villagers were involved" in the brutal killing of a couple on suspicion of witchcraft in Beluguri Munda village here, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Partha Pratim Saikia said on Wednesday.

He said such cases occur in remote areas due to lack of awareness and education.

ASP Saikia's remarks came after a couple was allegedly killed by a group of villagers over suspicions of witchcraft in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred on the night of December 30 in Beluguri Munda village near Howraghat in the hilly Karbi Anglong district. The deceased have been identified as Gardi Birua (43) and his wife



Mira Birua (33).

ASP Saikia said, "We got some information yesterday late at night that there was a couple, Mira Birua and Gardi Birua, in Beluguri Munda village near Howraghat. The villagers beat

them on the suspicion of witchcraft and burnt them alive... The investigation is continued... The FSL team is here... Initial information is that all the villagers were involved in this... This happens in remote areas due to a lack of awareness and education..."

Earlier, police said a group of villagers attacked the couple and allegedly burnt them to death after accusing them of practising witchcraft.

Speaking to ANI, Pushpraj Singh, Senior Superintendent of Police, Karbi Anglong, said it appeared to be a case of witch-hunting. "It is a witch-hunting case, and it appears that they attacked and allegedly burned them to death," he said.

He further added that the police have launched operations to apprehend the culprits.

A senior police official said

that at around 8:25 pm on December 30, the police received information over the phone that a couple had allegedly been killed by villagers on suspicion of witch-hunting at 1 No. Beluguri Munda Gaon under the Howraghat police station.

He further said that during the inspection of the place of occurrence, the items were seized: soil mixed with blood samples, one wooden stick, and one plastic Gamla containing liquid cow dung, suspected to have been used to wipe out bloodstains from the place of occurrence.

Police personnel have been deployed to the scene to secure the crime scene, and further legal action has been initiated.

Earlier, on May 6 this year, the Assam government notified the Assam State Policy to Combat Human Trafficking and End Witch-Hunting.

Centre Gives Positive Signal to Meghalaya's ILP-Style Entry Regime Under Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025

GUWAHATI

The Union government has responded positively to Meghalaya's proposal to introduce an Inner Line Permit (ILP)-style entry system in the state by leveraging provisions of the recently enacted Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong said on Tuesday.

Tynsong said the proposal was discussed during a recent meeting in New Delhi between Union Home Minister Amit Shah and a Meghalaya government delegation led by Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma. The discussions centred on how the new central legislation could be operationalised to replicate the ILP framework in the state.

Under the proposed arrangement, Meghalaya would be notified as a protected area under the 2025 Act, making it mandatory for



outsiders - including Indian citizens from other states as well as foreign nationals - to obtain permits before entering the state.

"The response from the Union

Home Minister has been encouraging," Tynsong said, indicating that the Centre is open to adapting the new law to address Meghalaya's long-standing concerns over unregulated entry and migration.

As a follow-up, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan is expected to hold a meeting shortly with Meghalaya Chief Secretary Shakil P. Ahammed and Director General of Police Idashisha Nongrang to work out the operational details of implementing the proposed system under the Act.

Tynsong clarified that the proposed mechanism would closely resemble the ILP regime currently in force in Arunachal Pradesh. It would include mandatory online registration for visitors at designated entry points, supported by facilitation centres to streamline the process.

He said embedding ILP-like

provisions within the Immigration and Foreigners Act would provide Meghalaya with stronger legal backing than the existing ILP framework, particularly in tackling illegal migration from Bangladesh - a major concern given the state's 449-kilometre-long international border, much of which is porous.

Responding to questions about reactions from pro-ILP groups, Tynsong said he was confident the proposal would receive broad support. "If the Centre approves the clause, the Immigration and Foreigners Act itself will effectively function as an ILP for Meghalaya," he said.

Such an arrangement, he added, would eliminate the need for a separate state-specific law while granting Meghalaya clear legal authority to regulate the entry of all outsiders through mandatory registration and monitoring mechanisms.

DESAM honours Manipur journalists, hails media as pillar of truth and public service

IMPHAL

The Democratic Students' Alliance of Manipur (DESAM) on Tuesday honoured journalists from across the state in recognition of their service and commitment to truth, responsibility and public service, underscoring the media's critical role in society.

The felicitation was held at DESAM's office as part of its annual programme, "Meet the Media Fraternity," traditionally organised on the last day of the year. This year's event was observed on the theme "Honouring the media fraternity for their contribution to truth, responsibility and public service."

Editors' Guild Manipur general secretary Yumnam Rupachandra Singh, who attended the programme as chief guest, lauded DESAM for acknowledging the work of journalists. He said such initiatives serve as a source of encouragement for media professionals to continue performing their duties with integrity and ethical commitment.

Describing the theme as timely and relevant, Singh said it reflected the core values journalists must uphold in an increasingly complex information landscape. He noted that societies progress when the media functions with a strong sense of responsibility, dedication and public accountability.

Reflecting on the evolution of communication, Singh said that while earlier generations relied on storytelling to transmit knowledge, wisdom and moral values, the me-

dia has now assumed that role in the modern era. He also highlighted the growing challenges faced by traditional media due to the rapid expansion of digital and social media platforms.

Calling the media the watchdog of society, Singh said its responsibilities go beyond informing to educating and engaging the public. While professional media organisations strive to adhere to ethical standards, he cautioned that unregulated and reckless dissemination of information on digital platforms has had a profound impact on social discourse.

DESAM president M Somorjit, in his address, said the student body has been working since 2002 to promote quality education in Manipur, and acknowledged the media's vital role in highlighting and disseminating its initiatives.

He said sustained media coverage has helped amplify DESAM's efforts and extend their reach to a wider audience.

Somorjit further observed that the media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and driving social development. Acknowledging the challenges, risks and sacrifices faced by journalists, he said words were often inadequate to fully capture the contribution of the media fraternity.

On behalf of DESAM, he extended wishes for strength, courage and continued commitment to journalists, urging them to remain steadfast in their service to society and the pursuit of truth.

TMP urges Centre to enact anti-racial law after killing of Tripura student sparks nationwide outrage

AGARTALA

The Tipra Motha Party (TMP), a junior ally of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Tripura, has called on the Centre to urgently enact a comprehensive anti-racial law, citing a rise in incidents of discrimination and racially motivated violence against people from the Northeast living in other parts of the country.

Addressing a press conference in Agartala on Wednesday, TMP spokespersons Rajeshwar Debbarma, CK Jamatia and Anthony Debbarma said the absence of a specific anti-racial legislation has allowed such incidents to continue with impunity. They argued that existing legal provisions are inadequate to address the unique nature of racial abuse and violence faced by people from the region.

"The lack of a dedicated anti-racial law has emboldened perpetrators," the leaders said, adding that a clear and comprehensive statute would enable systematic action against racism, curb discriminatory mindsets and act as a deterrent against hate crimes targeting people from the Northeast.

The demand comes in the wake of the killing of 24-year-old Tripura student Angel Chakma in Dehradun. Chakma, a final-year MBA student at a university in Uttarakhand and a member of the Chakma tribal community,



was allegedly assaulted by a group of miscreants on December 9 after being subjected to racial slurs. He succumbed to his injuries on December 26 after battling for his life for 18 days in a hospital.

Chakma was the son of a Border Security Force (BSF) jawan, a fact repeatedly highlighted by TMP leaders to underline what they described as the "deep injustice" of the incident. "While his father was guarding the country's borders, his son was brutally attacked inside the country because of his identity," Rajeshwar Debbarma said.

The TMP leaders demanded exemplary punishment for those responsible and called for the stringent application of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, in the case. They also criticised the Uttarakhand government and the Dehradun police for what they described as an initial delay in registering the case and taking firm action.

Anthony Debbarma alleged that the police acted only after sustained pressure. "The FIR was registered only after Tripura Lok Sabha

MP Kriti Devi Debbarman spoke to the Uttarakhand Chief Minister, and after Angel's father, Tarun Prasad Chakma, personally reached Dehradun and approached the police," he said.

TMP supreme Pradyot Bikram Manikya Debbarma, in a video message, strongly criticised the Uttarakhand government and the police, accusing them of attempting to downplay the racial nature of the crime. He rejected claims suggesting that the incident was not racially motivated.

"The attackers branded Angel as 'Chinki', 'Chinese' and 'Momo' before brutally assaulting him," Pradyot Debbarma said. "This cannot be brushed aside or diluted."

He further responded to statements by the Dehradun police that one of the arrested accused was from Manipur, saying such arguments were misleading. "People from different communities live and work across the Northeast as well. That does not change the fact that this was an act of racial hatred," he said.

Calling for unity among people of the re-

gion, the TMP chief urged the Northeast to collectively defend its interests and resist racism wherever it occurs. He reiterated his demand for immediate and exemplary punishment for all those involved in the crime and recalled that he had announced a reward of Rs 10 lakh for information leading to the arrest of the prime accused, who is believed to have fled to Nepal.

The killing of Angel Chakma has triggered widespread outrage across the northeastern states and beyond. Congress Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha and Assam MP Gaurav Gogoi, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduthoma, and Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma were among those who condemned the assault, describing it as a "horrific hate crime".

Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, Tripura Congress president Ashish Kumar Saha, the National People's Party led by Conrad Sangma, and several student and civil society organisations also expressed strong condemnation. These included the North East Students' Organisation (NESO), the apex body representing eight major students' unions of the region, the All India Chakma Students' Union (AICSU), the Manipuri Students' Federation and the Tripura Tribal Students' Union.

With political voices from across party lines echoing similar concerns, TMP leaders said the Centre must treat the issue with urgency. "This is not an isolated incident," Rajeshwar Debbarma said. "Without a strong anti-racial law, people from the Northeast will continue to live with fear and insecurity outside their home states."

Quest!

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Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor pays tribute at National War Memorial after assuming charge as Vice Chief of Air Staff



NEW DELHI

Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor laid a wreath at the National War Memorial in the national capital after assuming charge as the Vice Chief of the Air Staff here on Thursday.

The solemn ceremony marked his tribute to the fallen heroes of the Indian Armed Forces.

Senior officers of the Indian Air Force were present on the occasion as Air Marshal Kapoor paid homage, reaffirming the force's commitment to service, sacrifice and the defence of the nation.

Air Marshal Kapoor was commissioned into the fighter stream of the Indian Air Force

on 06 December 1986. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College. A Qualified Flying Instructor and a Fighter Combat Leader, he has more than 3400 hours of flying experience.

During his illustrious career, the Air Marshal has held numerous field and staff appointments. His operational tenures include being the Commanding Officer of a fighter squadron in the Central Sector, Station Commander of a flying base in the Western Sector and Air Officer Commanding of a premier air base.

He has done instruction-

al tenures as Chief Instructor (Flying) at Air Force Academy and as Directing Staff at the prestigious Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. During his tenure at the Air Force Academy, the Air Officer was instrumental in the induction and operationalisation of PC-7 MK II aircraft in the IAF.

He has also undertaken a diplomatic assignment as the Defence Attache in Pakistan. His staff appointments include Assistant Chief of Air Staff Operations (Strategy) at Air HQ, Air Defence Commander at South Western Air Command and Senior Air Staff Officer at HQ Central Air Command.

After Pinaka, DRDO conducts launch of two Pralay missiles

NEW DELHI

The DRDO on Wednesday successfully conducted a salvo launch of two Pralay missiles in quick succession from the same launcher. The test came a day after the successful maiden flight of the Pinaka Long Range Guided Rocket.

The Ministry of Defence said, "Both the missiles followed the intended trajectory, meeting all flight objectives as confirmed by tracking sensors deployed by the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur."

The flight test was carried out off the coast of Odisha at about 10.30 am as part of the user evaluation trials. Pralay is an indigenously developed solid propellant quasi-ballistic missile that uses advanced guidance and navigation systems to ensure high precision. It can carry different types of warheads to engage a variety of targets.

The missile has been developed by Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad, in collaboration with several DRDO laboratories, including Defence Research and Development Laboratory, Advanced Systems Laboratory, Armament Research and Development Establishment, High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, Defence Metallurgical Research Laboratory, Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory, Research and Development Establishment Engineers and Integrated Test Range.

The Ministry of Defence said that for these tests, the systems were integrated by the two Development-cum-Production Partners. Senior DRDO scientists, representatives of armed forces, and



industry representatives, witnessed the launch.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the completion of the salvo launch of the Pralay missile has established the reliability of the system. DRDO Chairman and Secretary Department of Defence R&D, Dr Samir V Kamat, said the achievement shows the system is close to induction for users.

Earlier, the maiden flight test of the Pinaka Long Range Guided Rocket was successful-

ly conducted at the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur. The rocket was tested for its maximum range of 120 kilometres and performed all planned in-flight manoeuvres. It hit the target with textbook precision.

The rocket was designed by the Armament Research and Development Establishment, in collaboration with the High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, and was supported by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory and

Research Centre Imarat. The trial was coordinated by ITR and Proof and Experimental Establishment. It was launched from the in-service Pinaka launcher, showing that different Pinaka variants of varying ranges can be fired from the same launcher.

The Indian Army plans to expand its deep and quick-strike capability, with the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher system expected to reach 10 regiments by 2026.

INTERNATIONAL

Cities around the world welcome 2026 with thunderous fireworks and heightened security



NEW YORK

From Sydney to Paris to New York City, crowds rang in the new year with exuberant celebrations filled with thunderous fireworks or light shows, while others took a more subdued approach.

As the clock struck midnight in Japan, temple bells rang and some climbed mountains to see the year's first sunrise, while a light show with somersaulting jet skis twinkled in Dubai. The countdown to 2026 was projected onto the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, while in Moscow people celebrated in the snow.

In New York City's Times Square, revelers braved frigid temperatures to celebrate with the famed New Year's Eve ball drop.

In Rio de Janeiro, revelers packed more than 4 kilometers (2 1/2 miles) of the city's Copacabana Beach for concerts and a 12-minute fireworks show, despite high tides that had both organizers and tourists worried and large waves that rocked barges carrying fireworks.

Other events were more subdued. Hong Kong held limited celebrations following a recent fire at an apartment complex that killed 161 people. Australia saluted the new year with defiance less than a month after its worst mass shooting in almost 30 years.

Crowds bundled up against the chilly temperatures cheered and embraced as the New Year's Eve ball covered in more than 5,000 crystals descended down a pole

in Times Square.

Revelers wearing tall celebratory hats and light-up necklaces had waited for hours to see the 12,350-pound (5,602-kilograms) ball drop. The festivities also included Tones and I performing John Lennon's "Imagine."

The television hosts interviewed visitors who were attending from such places as Florida, Mexico and South Korea, and read people's wishes for the new year.

After the ball dropped it was scheduled to rise again, sparking in red, white and blue, to mark the country's upcoming 250th birthday.

Police in the city had planned additional anti-terrorism measures at the ball drop, with "mobile screening teams." It was not in response to a specific threat, according to NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch.

Fireworks light-up the sky in central London to celebrate the New Year on Thursday, Jan. 1, 2026.

A heavy police presence monitored crowds watching fireworks in Sydney. Many officers openly carried rapid-fire rifles, a first for the event, after two gunmen targeted a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach on Dec. 14, killing 15.

An hour before midnight, victims were commemorated with a minute of silence, and the crowd was invited to show solidarity with Australia's Jewish community.

New South Wales Premier Chris Minns had urged residents not to stay away from festivities, saying extremists would interpret smaller crowds as a victory. "We have to show defiance in the face of this terrible crime."

Indonesia scaled back festivities in solidarity with commu-

nities devastated by floods and landslides in parts of Sumatra a month ago that killed over 1,100. Fireworks on the tourist island of Bali were replaced with traditional dances. Hong Kong rang in 2026 without fireworks over Victoria Harbor after the massive fire in November. Facades of landmarks were turned into countdown clocks and a light show at midnight.

And in Gaza, Palestinians said they hope the new year brings an end to the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

"The war humiliated us," said Mirvat Abed Al-Aal, displaced from the southern city of Rafah.

Pope Leo XIV closed out the year with a plea for the city of Rome to welcome foreigners and the fragile. Fireworks erupted over European landmarks, from the Colosseum in Rome to the London Eye.

In Paris, revelers converged around the glittering Champs-Élysées avenue. Taissiya Girda, a 27-year-old tourist from Kazakhstan, expressed hope for a calmer 2026.

"I would like to see happy people around me, no war anywhere," she said. "Russia, Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, I want everybody to be happy and in peace."

In Scotland, where New Year's is known as Hogmanay, First Minister John Swinney urged Scots to follow the message of "Auld Lang Syne" by national poet Robert Burns and show small acts of kindness.

Greece and Cyprus turned down the volume, replacing traditional fireworks with low-noise pyrotechnics in capitals. Officials said the change was intended to make celebrations more welcoming for children and pets.

Trump joins criticism of Clooney's French passport



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump piled on criticism Wednesday of a decision to grant Hollywood superstar George Clooney French passports after a junior government official in Paris labelled the move a "double standard".

An official decree seen by AFP on Monday showed that 64-year-old Oscar winner Clooney, his wife Amal Alamuddin Clooney and their two children had become French citizens.

Trump, whose administration has backed anti-immigration parties in Europe, said that Paris was welcome to the "Ocean's Eleven" star, a long-term Democratic supporter, fundraiser and a vocal critic of the president.

"Good News! George and Amal Clooney, two of the worst political prognosticators of all time, have officially become citizens of France which is, sadly, in the midst of a major crime problem because of their absolutely horrendous handling of immigration," Trump said on his Truth Social network.

The news of Clooney and his family becoming French comes ahead of language requirements for citizenship being toughened for everyone else under new immigration rules from January 1.

A junior member of President Emmanuel Macron's government had also criticised the decision to award passports despite Clooney speaking poor French.

"Personally, I understand the feeling of some French people of a double standard,"

Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, a junior interior minister, told the France Info radio station.

"We need to be careful about the message we're sending."

Her boss, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez, and the foreign ministry however defended the decision.

The civil code states that "French nationality may be conferred by naturalization, upon the proposal of the minister of foreign affairs, to any French-speaking foreigner who applies for it and who contributes through their distinguished service to France's influence and the prosperity of its international economic relations."

But Clooney has admitted that his French remains poor despite hundreds of lessons. Under the new immigration rules from Thursday, applicants will need a certificate showing they have a level of French that could get them into a French university. They will also have to pass a civic knowledge test.

Clooney has a property in southern France and said he has hailed French privacy laws that keep his family largely protected from international media intrusion.

"I love the French culture, your language, even if I'm still bad at it after 400 days of courses," the actor told RTL radio - in English - in December.

His wife, an international human rights lawyer and dual UK-Lebanese national, speaks fluent French.

Clooney bought the Domaine du Canadel, a former wine estate, near the Provence

town of Brignoles, in 2021. He said it is where his family is "happiest".

Nunez, the interior minister, said he was "very happy" with the actor and his family becoming French, saying the country was lucky to have them.

The French foreign ministry said the passport allocation for the Clooneys "meets the conditions set by law" for naturalisation. The family "followed a rigorous procedure including security investigations, regulatory naturalization interviews at the prefecture, and the payment of tax stamps," the ministry added.

It highlighted the Clooneys had a French home and they "contribute through their distinguished service to France's international influence and cultural prestige" through the actor's role in the film industry. This "can only contribute to maintaining and promoting France's position in this essential economic sector", it said.

Amal Clooney is "a renowned lawyer" who "regularly collaborates with academic institutions and international organisations based in France", the ministry added.

Around 48,800 people acquired French nationality by decree in 2024, according to interior ministry figures.

Clooney is not alone in wanting a French passport.

Hollywood director Jim Jarmusch announced on Friday that he was also applying, telling French radio that he wanted "a place to where I can escape the United States".

When "Safety" Becomes a Weapon: Manipur's Impunity Crisis and the Fragile Rule of Law

In what should have been a reassuring gesture, a recent statement from the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a prominent Meitei civil society organization, instead sent shockwaves across Manipur and beyond. The declaration that members of the Kuki-Zo community are now "safe" to travel in the Imphal Valley—a region long dominated by Meitei populations—was widely perceived not as a peace offering, but as an alarming revelation of the state's fractured governance and the pervasive power of non-state actors.

Far from signaling reconciliation, this statement exposes the dangerous reality that security in Manipur is no longer a neutral, state-administered guarantee but is instead contingent on the whims of groups with their own agendas. The very notion that one community must publicly "declare" another community safe underscores a profound breakdown in law enforcement and governance—a breakdown whose consequences have been deadly and far-reaching.

A State Torn Apart

The roots of Manipur's current crisis lie in a violent conflict that erupted on May 3, 2023. Since that date, the state has experienced sustained episodes of communal violence, mass displacement, and systematic attacks on civilian populations. Official statistics, which likely underreport the scale of suffering, cite over 250 deaths, thousands of injuries, and more than 60,000 displaced individuals. Entire communities have been uprooted, with thousands of homes burned and over 350 churches in Kuki-Zo areas destroyed.

The conflict has effectively carved Manipur into ethnically segregated enclaves, separated by "buffer zones" heavily guarded by central security forces. While these forces provide a semblance of order, they have largely failed to prevent attacks or hold perpetrators accountable. In this vacuum, armed militias—often aligned along ethnic lines—have assumed a de facto role in shaping the terms of everyday life, deciding who may live, move, or travel safely.

This is not mere communal strife; it is a violent, systematic partition of the state, enabled by political inaction and the emboldenment of paramilitary actors.

The Role of COCOMI

At the center of this alarming dynamic is COCOMI, an umbrella group presenting itself as a guardian of Manipur's "territorial integrity." Over the past two years, its rhetoric has played a highly controversial role in shaping public perceptions and justifying violent actions. In 2023, COCOMI described the conflict as a "Manipur national war" against "Chin-Kuki narco-terrorists," a characterization that observers argue inflamed ethnic passions and legitimized mob violence.

COCOMI's ecosystem includes groups like Arambai Tenggol, a Meitei militia implicated in attacks on Kuki-Zo villages, looting of state armories, and other forms of organized violence. These groups have operated with a level of impunity that signals either tacit state tolerance or institutional incapacity. It is within this context that COCOMI's "safety guarantee" must be understood.

By asserting that Kuki-Zo citizens are now "safe" to move through the valley, COCOMI inadvertently confirms a grim reality: that their security has long been contingent not on state protection but on the decisions of ethnically aligned groups. The statement is therefore less a reassurance than a confession, revealing a power structure in which law-abiding citizens are subject to the authority of non-state actors—actors who played a role in their previous suffering.

The Crisis of Impunity

Manipur's current predicament is inseparable from the chronic failure of law enforcement and judicial mechanisms. Despite repeated documentation of atrocities, investigations have been selective and prosecutions slow. While a few arrests of militia members have occurred, the broader networks that orchestrated violence continue to function largely without hindrance.

The failure to pursue justice systematically has two interlinked consequences. First, it entrenches the belief that armed militias can operate without consequence. Second, it communicates a stark message to minority communities: that the Indian state may prioritize the preservation of territorial and political stability over the protection of citizens' fundamental rights.

Under the current President's Rule, New Delhi bears ultimate responsibility for the protection of citizens' fundamental rights.

Remove negative people from your life. The people you spend time with influence your attitude, thoughts and success more than you think.



sibility for these lapses. The central government's inaction sends a devastating signal that the rights of minority citizens can be subordinated to the broader political project of maintaining Manipur's geographical unity. Credible peace and reconciliation cannot occur if one side perceives the state as either complicit in or indifferent to acts of mass violence.

Historical Context and Deep-Seated Tensions

The roots of the conflict extend far beyond the events of May 2023. Manipur's history is marked by contestations over land, identity, and political representation. Ethnic and tribal divisions have long been exploited by vigilante forces and political actors alike. Over decades, these contestations have intensified, fueled by deep-seated fears of marginalization, economic competition, and demographic change.

Kuki-Zo communities, often concentrated in hill districts but dispersed in urban and valley areas, have been particularly vulnerable. Their political and social rights have frequently been contested, their security repeatedly compromised. This vulnerability has been exacerbated by a pattern in which state authorities fail to respond adequately to threats or to enforce accountability.

The deployment of paramilitary and vigilante forces, often under the banner of "ethnic defense," has intensified these tensions. When non-state actors assert control over the safety of minority populations, it signals a profound crisis of legitimacy: the institutions meant to guarantee justice and protect citizens are either absent or actively circumvented.

The Illusion of Control
COCOMI's "safety" statement highlights the illusory nature of control in Manipur. By framing security as a concession from a dominant group rather than a universal right guaranteed by the state, the statement exposes the extent to which ordinary citizens are at the mercy of paramilitary actors.

This approach effectively shifts the burden of responsibility from the state to the very groups implicated in prior violence. It normalizes a power dynamic in which the victimized population must rely on the benevolence or strategic calculation of groups that previously sought to harm them. In doing so, it entrenches a hierarchy of power where one community holds de facto authority over another, outside any framework of law or accountability.

The Need for Immediate Accountability

Addressing this crisis requires far more than rhetoric or symbolic gestures. The Indian government must act decisively to restore the rule of law and dismantle networks of armed militias operating with impunity. Arrests of COCOMI leaders and militia figures, alongside transparent investigations into attacks on homes, churches, and villages, are essential steps. These are not punitive measures against a single community; they are prerequisites for any credible effort at reconciliation and lasting peace.

Moreover, the state must ensure the dignified rehabilitation of displaced populations. Over 60,000 individuals remain uprooted, with entire communities forced into precarious conditions. Without proper resettlement, social services, and protection, displaced populations are left vulnerable to further violence and exploitation, perpetuating cycles of grievance and retaliation.

Beyond Enforcement: Dialogue and Structural Reform

Law enforcement alone, however, is insufficient. A sustainable resolution requires inclusive dialogue that acknowledges historical grievances and fosters

trust across communities. Mechanisms must be put in place to guarantee political representation, equitable resource allocation, and recognition of minority rights.

Land disputes, often at the core of ethnic tensions, require impartial adjudication. Similarly, education and economic development initiatives should aim to reduce the structural inequalities that contribute to communal conflict. Without addressing these underlying drivers, cycles of violence will persist, regardless of the presence of security forces or temporary peace guarantees.

Impunity as a Catalyst for Future Violence

COCOMI's statement, whether intentionally or not, serves as a stark warning. It reflects the reality that impunity is the most reliable predictor of future violence. When armed groups can operate without consequence, when communities can only travel or live safely at the discretion of non-state actors, the stage is set for repeated cycles of conflict.

The time for accountability is not just overdue; it is a moral and constitutional imperative. Delays in prosecuting perpetrators, investigating attacks, and enforcing protections are not mere administrative failures—they are acts that compound suffering and entrench injustice. Every day that passes without decisive action further implicates the Indian state, eroding its credibility as a neutral arbiter and potentially transforming it into a facilitator of minority victimization.

A Crossroads for Manipur
Manipur today stands at a critical juncture. The choices made in the coming months will determine whether the state continues on a trajectory of fragmentation, or whether it can begin the arduous process of rebuilding trust and institutional authority.

For reconciliation to take root, the Indian state must demonstrate unequivocal commitment to impartial law enforce-

ment, the protection of minority communities, and the prosecution of those responsible for orchestrated violence. Symbolic assurances from civil society groups, while potentially valuable in dialogue, cannot substitute for the concrete responsibilities of the state.

The stakes are high. If impunity persists, Manipur risks entrenching ethnic divisions that could last generations. Communities may internalize fear and resentment, political structures may become increasingly polarized, and the social fabric of the state may unravel irreparably. Conversely, a firm commitment to justice and accountability could lay the groundwork for meaningful coexistence and stability.

Conclusion: The Imperative of Justice

COCOMI's declaration, intended as a gesture of reassurance, instead exposes the precariousness of life in Manipur and the failures of the state apparatus. It is a mirror reflecting unpunished crimes, a warning that impunity is both a cause and a consequence of violence, and a challenge to the Indian state to reclaim its authority as the guarantor of law and rights. For the Kuki-Zo community, for Meitei citizens committed to lawful governance, and for the broader integrity of the Indian Constitution, the message is clear: the restoration of safety, justice, and accountability cannot wait. The rule of law must be reasserted, perpetrators must be held responsible, and displaced communities must be rehabilitated with dignity.

Failure to act decisively risks not just further violence, but the permanent fragmentation of Manipur—a state that has already endured too much suffering, and where the stakes for justice, peace, and human dignity could not be higher.

In a land where "safety" has been weaponized as a privilege rather than a right, only accountable governance and robust enforcement of justice can transform fear into security, and impunity into a history that will no longer be repeated.

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Happy New Year 2026

May this New Year give you the courage to chase your dreams, the strength to overcome every challenge, and the wisdom to grow from every experience. Let each day inspire you to work harder, believe deeper, and move closer to your goals. Step into the New Year with confidence, hope, and unstoppable determination.

Happy New Year!

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Haflong: A hill town that lives between mist and memory



ty. Take a short drive out, and Haflong opens up even more. Villages sit on ridges and slopes, each with its own language, customs, and food. Bamboo groves line the road. Pineapple fields appear without warning. Streams cut across the hills in flashes of silver. Life here moves at a pace shaped by terrain, weather, and tradition. People often travel long distances for school, work, or basic supplies, and that distance becomes part of their everyday life.

Then there's the railway line. The old metre-gauge track that once connected Lower Assam to Barak Valley

familiar air. Children play in small courtyards. Dogs sleep on verandas. Neighbours lean on wooden railings to talk.

Tourism often paints Haflong as a hill station with blue hills, orchids, and cool weather. And while it has all of that, the real interest lies in the everyday life of the town. The smell of smoked meat from a Dimasa household. The sound of church choirs floating out on Sundays. The market stalls full of wild herbs, fermented bamboo shoots, and homemade dried fish. Small eateries serving chai and samosas next to shops selling traditional shawls. Policemen chatting with shopkeepers in the evening. College students gathering near the lake. These details give Haflong its character.

There's another side to the story.

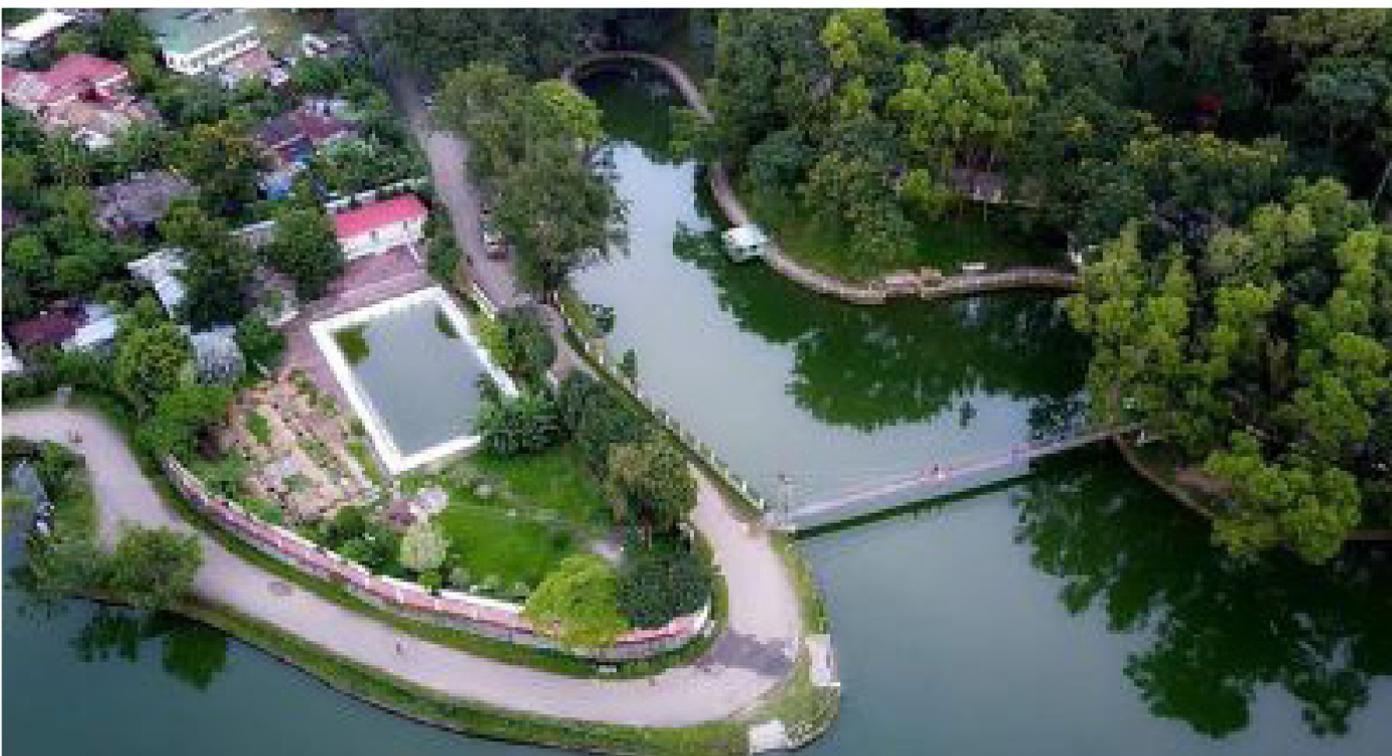
The first thing you notice when you reach Haflong is the silence. Not the absence of sound, but the kind that settles around you like a long exhale. Cars keep moving, people go about their day, shops open and shut, but the town carries a quiet rhythm of its own. It sits 680 meters above sea level, on a ridge in Dima Hasao district, and holds on to that rhythm even as change nudges it from all sides.

Haflong is not a postcard hill station built for tourists. It is a living town with layers of history, identity, and contradiction. The views are stunning, yes. The hills roll into each other like soft green dunes, and the sky widens in a way the plains rarely allow. But if you stop at the scenery, you miss its real story.

Walk through the main market, and the first thing that strikes you is how many worlds share space here.

Everyday gestures that outsiders may miss. The way shopkeepers speak four or five languages without thinking twice. The way festivals overlap. The way the same hill can host a church service in the morning and a community gathering of another group in the evening.

If you want to understand Haflong, start with the land itself. The hills shape everything here. Roads twist around slopes that crumble during heavy rain. Landslides are not unusual, and every monsoon tests the town's resilience. Despite that, Haflong



Dimasa traders selling vegetables, Bengali shopkeepers running old storefronts, Hmar and Zeme women walking in from nearby villages with baskets of greens, Nepali tea shop owners serving hot milk tea, and people from across the district mingling through the day. Haflong's diversity isn't something you need to look for. It is present in every conversation, every shop sign, and every courtyard.

Over the years, this coexistence has survived political shifts, ethnic tensions, and long stretches of neglect. What this really means is that the town has learned to build community in small, practical ways. Locals often say that Haflong functions because people understand each other's space. You see this in ev-

never feels desolate. The clouds play hide and seek across the valley. The mornings are crisp. The evenings bring a gentle chill. And somewhere around five, the light softens into a colour you rarely see in the plains — a muted gold that stays for a moment and then slips away.

Haflong Lake sits at the centre of town, a calm oval of water that reflects the sky on a good day and gathers fog on others. Decades ago, locals say, the lake was much clearer. Over time it has struggled with encroachment and pollution. Yet it remains the town's anchor. Elderly residents walk around it. Young people sit on the steps in groups. Visitors take the routine boat ride. The lake isn't postcard perfect, but it holds the town together in ways that go beyond beau-

through Haflong still lives in memory. Those who travelled on it recall the tunnels, the slow climb, and the way the train seemed to float along impossible cliffs. Today the broad-gauge line cuts through the hills with more efficiency, but the magic of that older route remains part of local lore. For many, the railway was their first window beyond the region. If you walk around the town's quieter lanes, you'll notice a kind of architectural patchwork. Old timber houses with sloping roofs. Assam-type homes with raised plinths. Government quarters from another era. New concrete buildings rising between them. Haflong has expanded over the last two decades, but the old neighbourhoods still carry a slower,

Haflong has seen conflict, mistrust, and long stretches of administrative challenges. People talk about earlier periods when fear shaped daily movement. Many still worry about infrastructure that doesn't match the town's potential. Healthcare gaps. Limited higher education options. Roads that need more than patchwork repairs. A railway line that occasionally suffers disruptions. The town stands at an awkward crossroads between aspiration and reality. But talk to residents long enough and you hear something else: a quiet belief that Haflong can grow without losing its core. They want better roads, stronger schools, more jobs, improved public spaces. They want tourism that respects the land instead of exploiting it. They want development that listens. Haflong doesn't need outside glamour. It needs steady attention and thoughtful planning. The heart of this town lies in its sense of balance. The way modern shops stand next to old houses. The way quick conversations slip between three or four languages. The way people gather for community decisions. The way the hills surround everything, holding the town in a kind of natural bowl. Haflong is not trying to be a big city. It is holding on to its identity while reaching for something better.

Haflong leaves an impression not because it overwhelms you, but because it stays with you quietly. Maybe it's the light on the hills at dusk. Maybe it's the sound of a guitar drifting out of a hostel room. Maybe it's the morning fog rolling over rooftops. Or maybe it's the simple fact that life here still has space to breathe. Haflong is a town that asks you to slow down, look closely, and listen. If you do, you begin to understand why people who grow up here carry it with them long after they leave.



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12 JAN
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JAN'25
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10 JAN
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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'.
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