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## PERSPECTIVE

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

### Pawan Hans conducts trial helicopter landings in five Nagaland districts under UDAN

DIMAPUR

Pawan Hans Limited (PHL) on Tuesday conducted trial landings of its helicopters in five districts of Nagaland as part of the Government of India's Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS)-UDAN, marking a key step towards the launch of regular helicopter services in the state.

According to an official release issued on Wednesday, the trial operations were carried out on January 13 to assess helicopter connectivity linking Mokokchung, Kohima, Phek, Tuensang and Zunheboto with Dimapur. The exercise was undertaken using a Pawan Hans Dauphin twin-engine helicopter (VT-ELG) after obtaining the necessary clearances from the respective district administrations.

Adequate safety and security arrangements were put in place at all helipads, including police deployment, fire tender services and ambulance facilities, to ensure smooth and secure operations.

Commissioner and Secretary, Nagaland Transport Department, Robert Longchari, along with Officer on Special Duty (Transport) M. Ababe Ezung and officials of the Nagaland State Transport department, received the Pawan Hans team at the Lerie helipad in Kohima.

Officials said the coordinated efforts of Pawan Hans Limited, the Nagaland Transport Department, and the deputy commissioners and district magistrates of the concerned districts were instrumental in the successful conduct of the trial landings. The meticulous arrangements and cooperation extended at the district helipads ensured a safe, secure and efficient operation.

## WHO SAID WHAT

**"It is reiterated that all Indian citizens and PIOs (persons of Indian origin) should exercise due caution, avoid areas of protests or demonstrations, stay in contact with the Indian Embassy in Iran and monitor local media for any developments."**

Ministry of External Affairs

## IMPHAL

The Manipur government said the rehabilitation and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remains its highest humanitarian priority, with comprehensive security assessments underway at all proposed resettlement sites to ensure long-term safety and stability.

In a letter addressed to representatives of IDPs and the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), Special Secretary (Home) A. Subash Singh said the resettlement process depends on several interlinked factors, including the prevailing security situation, preparedness of resettlement sites, availability of land, flow of funds, climatic conditions and livelihood feasibility.

"Rehabilitation and resettlement of IDPs remains the highest humanitarian priority. The process is being implemented in a phased, dynamic and pragmatic manner rather than as a rigid, one-time, deadline-driven exercise," the letter stated.



Manipur has witnessed prolonged ethnic violence since May 2023, with clashes between Meitei and Kuki communities claiming at least 260 lives and displacing

tens of thousands of people. The unrest has left large sections of the population living in relief camps across the state.

The government said it has

prepared a comprehensive resettlement plan covering around 60,000 displaced persons under various central and state schemes. The framework, it added, goes beyond physical relocation and places emphasis on education, livelihood opportunities and the overall well-being of affected families.

According to the letter, phased resettlement has already begun under a Rs 523-crore Rehabilitation and Resettlement package announced in the Manipur Budget 2025-26. Phase I focuses on families whose houses were partially damaged during the violence. Phase II covers families being provided permanent housing under the PMAY-G (Special Package) within their respective districts.

Phase III, described as the most complex, involves inter-district relocation between valley and hill districts. This phase requires enhanced coordination among civil authorities, security agencies and local stakeholders, along with substantial infra-

structure development and robust security arrangements.

The government said district commissioners, security forces and community representatives are jointly planning resettlement measures. Security barracks and deployment infrastructure are being integrated with housing projects, and resettlement is being undertaken only in areas where long-term peace and safety can be reasonably assured.

Reiterating its commitment, the government said IDP resettlement is being treated as a continuous humanitarian mission rather than a one-time administrative exercise. Regular engagement with community representatives is being maintained to address grievances, rebuild trust and restore dignity to those displaced by the violence.

The assurance comes amid continuing concerns among IDPs over safety, livelihoods and the pace of rehabilitation in a state still grappling with the aftermath of one of its worst internal conflicts in recent decades.

## Manipur's 'Manipuri Duck' recognised as indigenous breed by ICAR



## IMPHAL

Manipur's indigenous duck variety, popularly known as the 'Manipuri Duck' or Meitei Ngranu/Esing Ngranu, has received official recognition as a distinct native breed, marking a significant milestone in the conservation of the state's animal genetic resources.

The breed has been registered by the ICAR-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR), Karnal, following approval by the Breed Registration Committee at its 13th meeting held in New Delhi on November 12, 2025. The meeting was chaired

by Dr Raghavendra Bhatta, Deputy Director General (Animal Science), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Developed and documented by the Central Agricultural University (CAU), Imphal, the Manipuri Duck was among 13 indigenous livestock and poultry breeds approved for registration during the meeting. It has been assigned the accession number INDIA\_DUCK\_1200\_MANIPURI\_11008.

The breed registration certificate was formally handed over to CAU, Imphal, on January 14 during the Animal Breed Registration Certificate and Breed Conservation Award Distribution Ceremony in New Delhi. Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan presented the certificate, which was received on behalf of the university by Dr T.C. Tolenkhomba, Dr Haobijam Chaoba Singh and Dr M. Norjit Singh.

Officials said the recognition of the Manipuri Duck as an indigenous breed is a crucial step towards its scientific conservation and sustainable utilisation. The registration is expected to facilitate structured breeding programmes, protect the genetic identity of the breed and enhance livelihood opportunities for farmers engaged in traditional duck rearing across Manipur.

They added that the recognition also underscores the role of CAU, Imphal, in documenting and conserving indigenous livestock and poultry resources of the Northeast.

## NEW DELHI

The World Bank has approved loans worth USD 680 million for three major development projects in Assam aimed at strengthening climate resilience, improving governance and service delivery, and enhancing education and workforce readiness across the state.

In a statement, the Washington-based multilateral lender said its Board of Executive Directors cleared the projects on Tuesday to help Assam respond to extreme weather events, improve public administration, and equip more than four million students with skills needed to succeed in the job market.

The largest component is the USD 350 million Assam Disaster Resilient Hill Roads Development Project, which will focus on building climate-resilient road infrastructure, particularly in hilly and difficult terrain. The project is expected to reduce travel time and improve access for around 190,000 people, largely from tribal and rural communities.

The road project will also strengthen connectivity through upgraded transport and logistics hubs equipped with truck and container bays, taxi and bus terminals, and electric vehicle charging points.

Another USD 250 million has been approved for the Assam School Education and Adoles-



cent Wellbeing Project. The initiative aims to improve learning outcomes for more than two million primary school students across the state, while preparing an additional two million adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years for future employment. The programme will focus on life-skills training and curriculum enhancement, including the introduction of multilingual instruction.

The third project, the USD 80 million Assam Governance and Service Delivery Program, is designed to strengthen public financial management,

improve the allocation and utilisation of public resources, and enhance the delivery of administrative services to citizens and businesses. It will also support the development of a robust data ecosystem to improve transparency, efficiency and evidence-based policymaking in Assam. According to the World Bank, all three loans will have a final maturity of 16 years, including a grace period of three years, providing the state with long-term financing to implement reforms and infrastructure projects critical to sustainable growth.

## Roman script debate sharpens in Tripura as Tipra leaders warn of impact on future generations



## AGARTALA

The long-simmering debate over the script for Kokborok/Kau Bru has intensified in Tripura, with Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Bikram Manikya DebBarma and several elected tribal representatives pressing the state government to take a clear and immediate decision in favour of the Roman script.

According to documents accessed by India Today NE, a memorandum submitted to Chief Minister Manik Saha by elected members of the Tripura Legislative Assembly (TLA) and the Tripura

Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAAD) seeks formal recognition of the Roman script as the official script for Kokborok/Kau Bru. The memorandum has been signed by a number of tribal representatives, including ministers and MLAs, under the leadership of Pradyot Kishore Manikya, Chairman of the Administrative Reform Committee of the TTAADC.

The memorandum argues that the continued use and "imposition" of alternative scripts has hampered the growth, standardisation and wider acceptance of Kokborok, particularly in education and

administration. It contends that recognition of the Roman script is constitutionally permissible and that denial or prolonged non-recognition could amount to violations of Articles 14, 29(1) and 350A of the Constitution, as well as provisions of the Sixth Schedule.

The signatories maintain that the Tripura government has full legal competence to recognise and facilitate the Roman script through executive or policy decisions, without requiring legislative amendments at the national level.

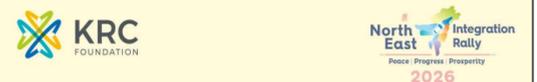
Among the specific demands, the elected representatives have called for the adoption of the Roman script as the official script for Kokborok in the state, printing of Kokborok question papers in Roman script for CBSE, ICSE and TBSE examinations, and publication of all Kokborok textbooks accordingly. They have also urged that government recruitment examinations, including those conducted by the Tripura Public Service Commission, allow the use of Kokborok in Roman script.

The memorandum recalls that Kokborok was recognised as a state language in 1979 through an amendment to the Tripura Official Language Act, 1964, and notes that the demand for the Roman script dates back to 1967. It also cites find-

ings of earlier language commissions - including the Shyama Charan Tripura, Kumud Kunda Chowdhury and Pabitra Sarkar commissions - which recorded broad support among Kokborok speakers for the Roman script.

Reacting to the development, Pradyot Bikram Manikya DebBarma said Tipra's elected representatives, including himself, have conveyed their "unambiguous support" for Kokborok/Kau Bru in Roman script to the authorities. He stressed that other elected Tripura representatives must also clearly state their position on the issue.

"Any ambiguity or silence will not just be a political choice - it will have consequences for our children and future generations," he said, warning that the issue goes beyond party lines and immediate political considerations. The script question has remained one of the most sensitive cultural and political issues in Tripura for decades. With formal memoranda now submitted and public statements sharpening the debate, the Roman script demand has once again moved to the centre of Tripura's linguistic and identity discourse, placing fresh pressure on the state government to take a definitive call.



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## Strategic Indo-German Alliance

In an era marked by geopolitical churn, economic uncertainty, and an increasingly weaponised global trade environment, the strengthening of the Indo-German partnership assumes exceptional strategic significance. The joint statement issued after talks between PM Modi and Chancellor Merz is not merely a diplomatic ritual; it is a clear signal of intent by two major democracies to align their political, security, and economic priorities in response to shifting global realities.

At the geopolitical level, the most consequential takeaway from the Modi-Merz engagement is Germany's unequivocal alignment with India on the issue of terrorism. By strongly condemning the terror attacks in Pahalgam and Delhi, and by reiterating the need to eliminate terrorist safe havens, infrastructure, networks, and financing, Germany has reinforced India's long-standing position on cross-border terrorism. This convergence is vital for New Delhi. Germany, as Europe's largest economy and a key influencer within the European Union, carries considerable diplomatic weight. Sustained Indo-German cooperation on counter-terrorism—especially through mechanisms such as the UN 1267 Sanctions Committee and the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism—will strengthen India's ability to isolate and counter Pakistan in international forums. In a global environment where narratives often dilute accountability, Germany's clarity lends India moral, political, and diplomatic reinforcement.

Equally important is the broader strategic context. The world today is witnessing what may be termed a "tariff syndrome"—a resurgence of protectionism, trade barriers, and strategic decoupling, particularly among major economies. For India, which is increasingly conscious of overdependence on any single market, diversification of trade partnerships has become a strategic necessity. With India looking to compensate for over \$100 billion worth of trade exposure to the United States amid evolving tariff regimes and uncertainties, Europe emerges as a natural and reliable alternative. The numbers already tell a compelling story. Bilateral trade in goods and services between India and Germany has crossed the \$50 billion mark, accounting for over 25 per cent of India's total trade with the European Union. This makes Germany our largest trading partner in Europe and also a gateway to the wider EU market. With trade reaching a record high in 2024 and momentum continuing into 2025, the renewed political push for deeper and broader economic engagement is likely to yield tangible dividends for both sides.

Germany can be a big market for Indian goods, services, and talent in the future. From pharmaceuticals and chemicals to IT services, engineering goods, and green technologies, India's competitive strengths align well with Germany's industrial needs. At the same time, German investments have played a crucial role in diversifying global supply chains—an objective increasingly shared by both nations amid global disruptions.

Perhaps the most promising dimension of the Indo-German alliance lies in technology and innovation. Germany's global leadership in automobiles, advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, batteries, automation, and industrial AI dovetails with India's ambitions under initiatives such as "Make in India" and "Digital India". India is actively seeking cutting-edge technologies in semiconductor fabrication and battery manufacturing, areas where German expertise can be transformative. The opening of Infineon's Global Capability Centre in GIFT City and the launch of a Semiconductor Ecosystem Partnership are early indicators of this synergy.

Beyond semiconductors, collaboration in AI, Industry 4.0, automation, telecommunications, and critical minerals—including rare earth extraction and recycling—offers immense long-term value. For India, access to German know-how in these sectors can accelerate domestic manufacturing, reduce import dependence, and strengthen strategic autonomy. For Germany, India provides scale, skilled manpower, and a rapidly expanding market.

Germany's position as a central pillar of the European Union further amplifies the importance of this partnership. A robust Indo-German economic relationship can serve as a catalyst for deeper engagement with other EU countries. A successful FTA would unlock new collaborations, reduce trade barriers, and institutionalise a win-win economic framework. At the level of foreign policy, the hand-in-hand stance of India and Germany adds considerable heft to India's global posture. Shared commitments to a free and open Indo-Pacific, UN reforms, climate action, and a rules-based international order reinforce India's image as a responsible and influential global actor. In a volatile world, this partnership offers India both balance and leverage—and promises Germany a trusted partner in Asia's fastest-growing major economy.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"You have to believe in yourself when no one else does."

—Serena Williams

# CHINA'S DISCURSIVE WAR LESS REASONS FOR INDIA TO INDULGE



DR. BHAVNA SINGH

A report by the US Pentagon recently became the reason for unease amongst the apparatchiks in the Chinese political circles with the US disclosing a huge build-up of China's military arsenal. The assessment exposed that in 2024 China "tested essential components" of Taiwan invasion options, "including through exercises to strike sea and land targets, strike US forces in the Pacific, and block access to key ports." US assessment of China's military capabilities took into consideration the fact that its primary focus will be the First Island Chain that runs from the Japanese archipelago to the Malay peninsula and the PLA continues to make steady progress toward its 2027 goals whereby PLA will try to achieve "strategic decisive victory" over Taiwan. That is, to be able to fight and win a war on Taiwan by end of 2027.

US experts believe that China would not rule out unification of Taiwan by brute force and this could mean an amphibious invasion, fire-power strike and possibly a maritime blockade. This is augmented by its ambitions to crackdown on proponents of separatist movements such as the "Tibetan independence" and the creation of "East Turkistan." The report also highlighted that since the first full year of Xi Jinping in power, China's announced defense budget has nearly doubled. In July 2024, Beijing announced a new wave of reforms for the PLA focused on political discipline and military modernisation, largely on spurring military-civilian fusion. This would be achieved through three major strategic capabilities — "Strategic decisive victory, strategic counter balance and strategic deterrence and control." An interesting aspect of their understanding of Chinese strategic behaviour was how China views defense and

military engagements as a tool to punish or reward the US for its perceived behaviour.

The reaction from Chinese officials was strong. The Chinese Ministry of National Defense and Foreign Ministry have strongly pushed back on the Pentagon's annual report by stating that it misrepresents the country's military intentions and distorts its defense policy, accusing the US of harbouring a 'cold-war thinking.' China also urged the US to stop fabricating false narratives and avoid stoking confrontation by interfering in its internal affairs. China strongly rejected claims by the US that it may have deployed over 100 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Chinese officials denied this interpretation and countered that the US is using such narratives to justify its own nuclear expansion, calling on Washington to reduce its arsenal and promote real arms control. Even Chinese state media and military experts echoed government criticisms that US warnings were exaggerated or misinformed, sometimes framing the report as part of sustained US efforts to contain China.

As a response to the US report, China imposed sanctions on 30 US firms and individuals on 26 December 2025, after the Donald Trump administration approved a USD 11.1 bn arms sale to Taiwan. It also imposed sanctions on several US defence firms, including a branch of the US's Boeing and Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation, over their sale of weapons worth over USD11 billion to Taiwan. Notably, even the Taiwanese Parliament faced hurdles to push through a USD37 billion special military spending package due to political disagreements between China and the US.

Overall, the report highlights several issues that are critical to understand the Chinese military modernisation from the US perspec-

tive but more importantly, only a few days before, China had also published its White paper on 'China's Arms Control, Disarmament and Nonproliferation in the New Era' (27 November 2025, previous ones in 1995 and 2005), which re-emphasized its position vis-à-vis the current international security situation and reiterated its commitment to governance norms based on peaceful use of science and technology; entwining it with its peaceful rise and harmonious society perspectives. China's assurances that it is firmly opposed to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and means of delivery, and it intends to strengthen its domestic export controls, are however by no means a guarantee against its domestic use of force against any threat that it considers needs a military response. In fact, the White paper only bolsters its confidence and showcases its increased capabilities as far as new frontiers of strategic security including outer space, cyberspace and artificial intelligence.

Notwithstanding the retorts from the Chinese government, it is extremely clear that the US assessment is likely the closest to reality that one can get considering China's opaqueness in sharing its data and technology. While the US report is sensitive in nature due to the issues it raised, the Indian defence establishment has less inclination to comment on our neighbour's military build-up and its cooperation with Pakistan. There was no formal statement from the Ministry of external Affairs directly addressing the Pentagon's 2025 'China military and Security Developments report.' On the other hand, China itself accused the US of trying to "undermine Sino-Indian ties" and distort its policies stating that China's relationship with Pakistan was driven by Indian concerns.

So, though tensions have eased between the two Asian neighbours,

renewed risks of friction on territorial issues could be portended. Perhaps, India has taken note of China's attempts to frame its position on Arunachal Pradesh as a "core interest" but has not responded to a US sponsored document. India's position on Arunachal has been clear and the understanding to resolve it bilaterally is what drives responses from the Indian government and the strategic community. India is likely to continue to handle its relations with China based on its own risk assessments and also the need not to derail the process of disengagement at the border.

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**"The Supreme Court order is a big slap on the face of the TMC govt of Mamta Banerjee. The Supreme Court stays the FIR on ED officials by the West Bengal police. The Supreme Court calls actions by West Bengal police as Prima Facie- "Situation of lawlessness." Mamata Banerjee's Attempt to act as "victim" fall flat! TMC & its corrupt link with private company are getting exposed!"**

**Pradeep Bhandari  
National Spokesperson BJP**



## Asom Bani died silently, an unceremonious departure for the news weekly

NAVA THAKURIA

Amid existential crisis in northeast India's well-known media house the Assam Tribune group of newspapers, which worsened after the Covid-19 pandemic, a popular Assamese weekly newspaper lost its publication in the later part of 2025. Asom Bani, once a mainstream weekly for Assamese readers for decades, stopped hitting the stand since September last year, as the management lost interest to continue its printing on every Friday. Even though the seven decades old Guwahati-based Assamese-language weekly was lost in the media market, the management did not make any statement about Asom Bani's fate. Prior to its departure, the weekly was merged with Dainik Asom, an acclaimed Assamese daily from the prestigious media house, as its Friday supplement.

Once edited by prominent Assamese journalist-authors namely Satish Chandra Kakati, Tilak Hazarika, Phani Talukdar, Nirod Choudhury, Homen Bargohain, Chandraprasad Shaikia, the weekly had Dilip Chandan as its last editor, who served Asom Bani for nearly three decades. Launched on 1 July 1955 by legendary Assamese entrepreneur Radha Govinda Baruah, the weekly witnessed and reported various important socio-political developments including Assamese medium (of instruction in schools) movement, Assam anti-influx agitation, abrupt rising of separatist-influenced insurgency, social unrest, emergence of regional politics and its diminishing popularity with all sincerity to the indigenous population.

As the pandemic severely affected the

circulation of all newspapers published by the Assam Tribune group, the subsequent impact was observed in shrinking advertisement revenues from commercial entities. Like many other media institutions across India, the Assam Tribune group also faced a severe financial crisis that started reflecting in irregular salary disbursements to the employees including the working journalists. The employees union came to the public with various difficulties including the unpaid dues meant for the retired employees. The union leaders also made allegations that their group was not receiving a heavy amount of money from the State information & public relations directorate (against the published advertisements).

Soon rumours spread over the probable sale of the entire media group to another city-based television house. The Tribune management initially denied it terming those as false and motivated interpretations. In an official statement, the management assured its firm commitment to its editorial independence, journalistic integrity, and continuing services to its readers, advertisers, and stakeholders'. The management even urged all concerned to 'disregard such baseless speculation and refrain from spreading misinformation'. Needless to mention that its primary news outlet The Assam Tribune, which came to light on 4 August 1939 (first editor being Lakshminath Chuklan) and continues to be the highest circulated English daily in the north-eastern region.

But assurances of the management led by Prafulla Govinda Baruah (second son of

RG Baruah, who lately died on 14 December at the age of 93) did not prevent from handing over the responsibility of Dainik Asom, by now its over six decades old publication, to a different media group owned by young entrepreneur Kishor Borah that runs an Assamese satellite news channel ND24. The deal was made public on 17 September last year following which new management took the responsibility to publish Dainik Asom, but did not prefer to take care of Asom Bani (which already ceased to be an independent publication). As a supplement of Dainik Asom, the weekly hit the stands on 12 September 2025 for the last time.

The new management of Dainik Asom did not pick up all the engaged media employees and on a single day on 18 September over 70 employees (many of them were enjoying extended tenures with a monthly lump sum payment) lost their jobs. The Assam Tribune management assured them of all legal dues within a few weeks, but it was not materialised. Having no options, they have approached the labour court demanding their dues (which seemingly to the tune of rupees six crores altogether). It's unfortunate that the media house, which was India's first institution to implement the recommendations of statutory Majithia Wage Board in 2012, now takes the route of escapist (avoiding the legal payments to the retired employees).

Media observers believe that the Tribune house usually maintained its credibility while disseminating information, editorial viewpoints and other pieces of articles, but

in recent times the same principles were largely compromised. Their prime mover (The Assam Tribune) lavishly supported the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act movement that broke out in 2019, where it provided huge space to the public uprising that denounced the Union government's initiative to politically persecute the persecuted Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian families coming from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to India. The chaos engulfed the Brahmaputra valley of Assam for weeks with the narrative that the new citizenship law would discredit the Assam Accord (signed in 1985 to culminate the six years long anti-foreigner agitation). Moreover, the people of Assam remember when the newspaper produced a series of voluminous reports on the backdrop of a city press club election with little credibility, where the editorial focus was exposed as biased, unprofessional and maligned with character assassinations to the then secretary of Guwahati Press Club putting its hard earned integrity on stake. The Assam Tribune, in particular, exercised its liberty (but with no accountability) to report over the matter according to the callous planning of some ill-motivated reporters. If the present financial status of Assam Tribune group becomes dire, it was not entirely orchestrated by the pandemic alone, rather the situation made complicated by a section of arrogant media professionals, who enjoyed all due benefits but bet upon creating disorders in the media house, and shockingly the management preferred to remain a mute spectator to the entire developments.

## Manipur BJP terms Congress opposition to VB-GRAM-G 'political propaganda'

IMPHAL

The Manipur Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday hit back at the Congress for opposing the Centre's newly introduced Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-GRAM-G] Act, accusing the party of spreading misinformation and politicising a rural welfare initiative.

Addressing a press conference, Manipur BJP president A. Sharda Devi described the Congress campaign against the VB-GRAM-G Act as "unfortunate and irresponsible," alleging that it was driven by political considerations rather than genuine concern for farmers and rural workers.

"The Congress party's opposition to the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act is a calculated attempt to mislead rural communities and create confusion for narrow political gains," Sharda said.

Explaining the intent behind the new legislation, she said the VB-GRAM-G Act replaces the



Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of building a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, with greater emphasis on

productivity, income security and sustainable rural development.

Under the new framework, Sharda said, the number of guaranteed workdays has been in-

creased from 100 to 125 days, which would lead to higher wage earnings and improved livelihood security for rural households.

Responding to the Congress' objections over the renaming of the scheme, the BJP leader termed the criticism selective and politically motivated. She pointed out that Mahatma Gandhi's name was added to the employment scheme only in 2005, a year after its launch in 2004, without attracting similar political opposition at the time.

"Renaming or restructuring welfare schemes to reflect changing national priorities is not unprecedented. The Congress remained silent then but is objecting now purely for political convenience," she said.

Reiterating the BJP's commitment to farmers and rural communities, Sharda said their role was central to India's development goals. "India cannot become a developed nation without the participation of farmers and rural workers. That is why the Modi government has placed them at the heart of the Viksit Bharat agenda,"

she added. Drawing a comparison between the two parties' records, Sharda claimed that during the Congress-led government's 10-year tenure, around ₹2.5 lakh crore was spent on MGNREGA, while the BJP-led government has spent about ₹8.5 lakh crore over a comparable period, reflecting what she described as a stronger focus on rural welfare.

Outlining key features of the VB-GRAM-G Act, she said the scheme guarantees 125 days of wage employment per rural household and includes a cumulative 60-day no-work window to ensure adequate availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. She also said the new Act places emphasis on technology-driven monitoring systems to improve transparency, curb leakages and ensure timely payment of wages.

"The VB-GRAM-G Act is not merely a welfare programme. It is a structural reform aimed at empowering rural India and promoting inclusive growth," Sharda said.

### Assam CM warns traders against underpaying farmers, enforces Rs.2,670 paddy procurement price

DIPHU

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on January 14 issued a stern warning against the exploitation of farmers during the ongoing paddy procurement season, asserting that strict legal action will be taken against anyone purchasing paddy below the government-fixed minimum support price (MSP).

Speaking to the media in Diphu, the Chief Minister said the procurement price of paddy has been fixed at ₹2,670 per quintal and made it clear that the rate is non-negotiable. He cautioned private traders and other buyers against paying farmers less than the notified price, stressing that such practices would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Sarma said the state government is closely monitoring procurement activities to ensure that farmers receive fair and remunerative prices for their produce. He criticised the role of middlemen and unscrupulous traders, alleging that they often exploit farmers' limited market access and immediate financial needs to force distress sales.

"The government is committed to protecting farmers from exploitation and ensuring that the benefits of its policies reach cultivators directly," the Chief Minister said, reiterating the administration's pro-farmer stance. He added that enforcement mechanisms are in place and any violation of procurement norms would invite punitive action under the law.

In a move aimed at strengthening local procurement infrastructure, Sarma said the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) is considering setting up rice mills in each Legislative Autonomous Council (LAC) under its jurisdiction. Such an initiative, he said, would reduce farmers' dependence on private traders, promote local value addition and facilitate smoother procurement at fair prices.

### Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Union Minister Scindia review Manipur's polo development roadmap

IMPHAL

In a renewed effort to strengthen Manipur's legacy sport, Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) Jyotiraditya M. Scindia on Tuesday reviewed the State's comprehensive roadmap for the development of polo. The high-level review meeting was held via video conferencing at the Conference Hall of Lok Bhavan here on January 13 and focused on proposals submitted by the Manipur government to promote polo through a structured and long-term development framework.

Emphasising the need for a strategic and phased approach, Scindia advised that the development plan should include systematic identification of talent from different districts, grouped according to geographic clusters.

He further suggested that promising players be linked with centres of excellence to ensure access to professional training, advanced facilities and sustained growth of the sport.

The Union Minister stressed that a clear roadmap, backed by phased implementation and institutional support, would be crucial to revitalising polo and restoring Manipur's historical association with the game.

Governor Bhalla welcomed the suggestions and assured that the recommendations would be incorporated into subsequent stages of planning and execution to ensure holistic development of polo in the State.

The meeting also highlighted the importance of efficient, time-bound and outcome-oriented implementation of development initiatives to accelerate overall progress in Manipur.

## Meji fire symbolises hope and purity, not destruction: CM Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday criticised the Congress, accusing the party of disrespecting Assamese culture and misrepresenting the spiritual significance of the Magh Bihu fire ritual to acts of violence.

Termining the controversy surrounding the Meji fire as "deeply unfortunate", Sarma said the ritual symbolises purification, hope and the removal of inauspiciousness, and has no association with destruction or hatred.

Defending Assamese customs, the Chief Minister said Bihu, the most revered festival of the state, has always stood for harmony and well-being. "The Meji is lit to cleanse negativity and darkness. It is meant to wash away sorrow and bring light, prosperity and



happiness into every household," he said.

Sarma noted that fire holds a positive spiritual connotation across all three Bihus - Bohag, Magh and Kati - where it represents renewal and illumination. "Assamese people have never used Bihu to harm anyone. Burning a Meji is not the same as burning someone's house, office or building. Such acts reflect violence and hatred, which have no place in our festival," he said.

Taking a swipe at the Congress over a social media post allegedly depicting the burning of Vajpayee Bhawan, the Chief Minister accused the party of deliberately distorting the cultural meaning of the ritual. "The purpose of the Meji fire is constructive, not destructive. It is the fire of light that dispels darkness. Unfortunately, the Congress does not understand this," he

remarked.

The Chief Minister further claimed that the Congress had lost touch with Assamese language, culture and traditions. "A party that does not understand Assamese identity cannot respect its festivals. That is why such insensitive imagery is being circulated," he said.

Sarma said no official action would be taken over the incident, adding that public awareness would be the most appropriate response. "The people of Assam understand the true essence of Magh Bihu and what the Meji represents," he said.

Reiterating the cultural and spiritual ethos of the festival, the Chief Minister said the Meji fire is lit with prayers for the removal of sorrow, illumination of homes and the spread of harmony - values that remain central to Assamese life.

### Senior advocate seeks Gauhati High Court bench in Barak Valley to improve access to justice

SILCHAR

A senior advocate based in Silchar has submitted a petition to top constitutional authorities seeking the establishment of a Circuit Bench or a Permanent Bench of the Gauhati High Court in the Barak Valley, citing long-standing challenges faced by litigants in accessing justice.

Sources said the seven-page memorandum was sent by post on January 12 by senior advocate Dharmananda Deb. The petition was addressed to the Assam Chief Minister, the Union Minister for Law and Justice, the Chief Justice of India, the Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court, the Governor of Assam, and the Cabinet Minister of the Barak Valley Development Department.

In the memorandum, the advocate pointed out that the principal



seat of the Gauhati High Court in Guwahati is nearly 350 km away from the Barak Valley, creating serious logistical and financial hardships for litigants. He noted that frequent floods and landslides

during the monsoon further disrupt road and rail connectivity, making travel particularly difficult for the elderly, the sick, and economically weaker sections.

The petition argued that the distance and poor connectivity discourage many residents from filing writ petitions, public interest litigations (PILs) or seeking urgent constitutional remedies, thereby adversely affecting their fundamental right to access justice under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.

Deb recalled that similar proposals for a High Court bench in the Barak Valley were not accepted by the Gauhati High Court administration in 2014 and 2015. However, he stressed that more than a decade has since passed, during which the region has witnessed significant population growth and a marked increase in the volume and complex-

ity of legal cases.

The memorandum also referred to recent administrative developments, including the establishment of a Mini Secretariat and the creation of the Barak Valley Development Department, which reflect growing decentralisation. Despite these changes, it said, geographical distance and inadequate connectivity with Guwahati continue to pose major barriers to effective access to justice.

Arguing in favour of a Circuit or Permanent Bench, the advocate said such a move would ease hardship for litigants, ensure quicker disposal of cases, and help reduce the burden on the principal bench in Guwahati. He added that the proposal would strengthen the spirit of Article 39A of the Constitution, which mandates equal access to justice for all citizens.

### Tripura-Mizoram natural gas pipeline 45% complete, slated for December 2027 commissioning

AGARTALA

Construction of the natural gas pipeline linking Tripura and Mizoram is progressing steadily, with about 45 per cent of the work completed so far, officials said on January 15, reaffirming that the project remains on track for completion by December 2027.

The 119.5-km pipeline is being implemented by Indradhanush Gas Grid Limited (IGGL) under the North East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid. It will originate from the Panisagar receiving terminal in Tripura and pass through Kanhmun, Zawlunam, Kawrthah, Tuidam and Darlak before reaching near Mamit in Mizoram. From there, the pipeline will extend towards Lengte and terminate at the proposed Sihhmui receiving terminal, located about 21 km from Aizawl.

Once the pipeline reaches Sihhmui, Tripura Natural Gas Corporation Limited (TNGCL) will provide piped natural gas connections to households in Aizawl city, officials said.

Mizoram's Minister for Food, Civil Supplies and

Consumer Affairs, B Lalchanzova, visited Agartala on Wednesday to review the project's progress. During the visit, he held meetings with officials of TNGCL and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and inspected a compressed natural gas (CNG) station in the city.

The minister also visited a residential complex in Agartala where around 330 households have already been connected to piped natural gas, gaining first-hand experience of the system's benefits.

Addressing TNGCL officials, Lalchanzova said the pipeline would be a major milestone for Mizoram, ensuring a reliable and affordable supply of natural gas. He noted that the fuel would support not only domestic consumption but also commercial, industrial and transport sectors. Expressing optimism about the project's broader impact, the minister said it was expected to create employment opportunities and facilitate the establishment of major industries in the state. He urged IGCL and TNGCL to maintain strict adherence to timelines to ensure completion within the stipulated period.

## From 'Apot' to 'Nora', Northeast cinema takes centre stage at Sailadhar Baruah Film Awards



GUWAHATI

Films from across the Northeast dominated the spotlight at the 8th Sailadhar Baruah

Quest!

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Film Awards (North East) 2025, held on January 10 and 11 at the Rudra Barua Auditorium, Jyoti Chitran Studio here, reaffirming the region's growing creative footprint in Indian cinema.

The two-day event brought together filmmakers, critics, artists and cinema enthusiasts, celebrating the diversity, cultural depth and storytelling traditions of the Northeast through an extensive showcase of films and discussions.

Dedicated to strengthening cultural bonds within the region through cinema, the Sailadhar Baruah Film Awards seek to promote shared values while recognising excellence across all aspects of filmmaking - from direction and screenwriting to music, acting and technical craft.

The top honour for Best Film was awarded to Apot, a Khasi-language film based on a traditional folktale from Meghalaya. Directed and produced by Raphael Warjri, the film received a trophy, certificate and a cash prize of ₹50,000. Warjri's work was also recognised in the music category, with Augustine Kurbah winning Best Music Director for Apot.

The Best Director award went to Prakash Deka for the Assamese film Nora, which also earned Manas Protim Goswami the Best Sound Designer award. Sanjib Sabhapandit won Best Screenwriter for Aakash Heno Nodir Naam (Assamese).

Aniruddha Barua was named Best Cinematographer for the Assamese film Taarikh, while Priyakanta Laishram received Best Film Editor for the Manipuri film Oneness. Bhaskar Jyoti Kalita won Best Art Director for The Woodcutter (Assamese).

In the acting categories, Raju Roy won Best Actor for his performance in Noi Kotha (Assamese), while Rodali Bora was adjudged Best Actor (Female) for her role in Burkha - The Veil.

The jury conferred Special Mention awards on Jatindra Nath Khanikar for his performances in Burkha - The Veil and

Gomon. Dhiraj Kashyap received a special mention for directing Brahmakanya (Assamese), while Khanjan Kishore Nath was recognised for his direction of the Karbi-language film Kangbo Aloti. All special mention awardees received certificates and mementoes.

The awards ceremony was graced by National Award-winning actress and Golden Lotus-winning documentary filmmaker Suhasini Mulay as chief guest. She was joined by Guest of Honour Manjula Barua - an acclaimed actress, art director and costume designer - and renowned filmmaker Jahnur Barua.

The event also featured interactive sessions with filmmakers. On January 10, Raphael Warjri (Apot) and Prakash Deka (Nora) participated in a moderated discussion led by Munin Bayan, sharing insights into their creative processes. On January 11, veteran film critic Manoj Barpujari engaged in a conversation with Suhasini Mulay on cinema and storytelling.

Lifetime Achievement Awards were presented to eminent music composer Dr. Ramen Choudhury and popular singer Samar Hazarika in recognition of their enduring contributions to Assamese music and cinema.

The programme concluded with the release of Cinejyoti, a special souvenir edited by Ranjit Das, which was unveiled by Suhasini Mulay, Manjula Barua, Jahnur Barua, Sailadhar Baruah Film Awards Trust President Mrinmoy Baruah, and the editor.

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## Around 80% of 114 Rafale jets to be built in India

# 'Indian Army, cornerstone of nation's defence architecture': CDS Gen Anil Chauhan



NEW DELHI

In the proposed deal for buying 114 Rafale fighter jets for the Indian Air Force, around 80 per cent of the combat aircraft are planned to be built in India.

The project would also see some of the manufacturing facilities getting shifted from France to India.

The Indian side is also discussing with French officials for maximising the localised content in the deal with plans of setting up the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility within India to maximise the serviceability of the planes, government sources told.

The sources said the two sides will negotiate the cost of the project further. The French price offer has

taken into account the inflation rate increase in prices at around four per cent per annum.

Sources said that with a large number of parts and systems of the Rafales to be built in India, there is also a possibility of the French Dassault Aviation using an Indian entity for export orders and offering Indian facilities as a hub for MRO for countries in the region operating the Rafale and other Dassault aircraft.

Sources said in the present circumstances, the Rafale has been found to be the best suited to meet Indian Air Force requirements for fighter aircraft, as the serviceability is around 90 per cent, which is much higher than any other aircraft in the world, including the

American F-35.

The Indian Air Force has been pushing for the case to buy 114 Rafale fighter jets for a long time after it was selected in a multi-vendor tender.

The Indian Air Force is grappling with the issue of depleting fighter aircraft squadrons and the indigenous project is also getting delayed due to issues with engines as well as integration of foreign-made equipment with the LCA Mark 1A aircraft.

Already faced with two active fronts in Pakistan and China, Bangladesh is also fast becoming a security challenge. Amid this situation, the number of fighter aircraft squadrons required by the Indian Air Force is going beyond the long-accepted requirement of 42 squadrons.

NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Thursday extended greetings to all ranks of the Indian Army, their families, veterans and Veer Naris on the occasion of the 78th Army Day, underlining the force's legacy of valour and its need to continuously adapt to future warfare.

In his Army Day message, CDS Chauhan described the Indian Army as the "cornerstone of the nation's defence architecture" and its most dependable pillar, recalling its role in safeguarding the country against both external and internal challenges.

CDS Chauhan lauded the Indian Army's enduring contributions, saying, "The Indian Army has a rich history of valour, sacrifice and unwavering commitment to the nation. It has been the cornerstone of the nation's defence architecture and its most reliable pillar. The Army's indomitable spirit was once again evident during Operation Sindoor, where it demonstrated unyielding courage and tactical brilliance. The nation stands proud of its achievements in overcoming both external and internal challenges."

Emphasising the importance of preparedness for future challenges, the Chief of Defence Staff urged the armed forces to avoid a comfort zone mindset and adopt a forward-looking approach to modern warfare.

"No service, including the Army, can afford to rest on its past laurels. It must adopt a forward-looking approach, proactively incorporating strategies for future warfare and warfighting. My compliments to the Indian Army for taking great strides by anticipating tomorrow's challenges and initiating the modernisation process to maintain the cutting edge," he said.

CDS Chauhan underscored the evolving nature of conflicts, noting, "Future wars shall demand Multi-Domain Operations. The Indian Armed Forces must continue to deepen tri-services synergy. Indian Army must prioritise structural reforms and promote a cultural shift to achieve jointness and integration with the



Navy and the Air Force - a must to operate in a Multi Domain Operational environment."

He urged the Army to embrace the Prime Minister's mantra of "JAI" - Jointness, Atmanirbharta, and Innovation.

"I would urge the Indian Army to emphasise on "JAI" - Jointness, Atmanirbharta & Innovation, the

mantra given by our Prime Minister. We must deepen integrated planning, training and operations, contribute towards accelerating indigenous capability development ensuring an imaginative, inventive and innovative approach. I am sanguine that Indian Army will continue to remain ever prepared while transiting towards integrated structures," CDS Chauhan

said in his message.

January 15 is observed as 'Army Day' each year to commemorate the occasion when General (later Field Marshal) KM Cariappa assumed command of the Indian Army from General FRR Bucher, the last British Commander-in-Chief, in 1949 and became the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of Independent India.

## INTERNATIONAL

# Trump says Iran killings stopped, Tehran says 'no plan for hanging'



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said Wednesday he had been told the killings of protesters in Iran had been halted, but added that he would "watch it and see" about threatened military action.

Trump had repeatedly talked in recent days about coming to the aid of the Iranian people over the crackdown on protests that rights groups say has left at least 3,428 people dead.

But in a surprise announcement at the White House, Trump said he had now received assurances from "very important sources on the other side" that Tehran had now stopped, and that executions would not go ahead.

"They've said the killing has stopped and the executions won't take place - there were supposed to be a lot of executions today and that the executions won't take place -- and we're going to find out," Trump

said. He offered no details and noted that the United States had yet to verify the claims.

Asked by an AFP reporter in the Oval Office if US military action was now off the table, Trump replied: "We're going to watch it and see what the process is."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi later said there would be "no hanging today or tomorrow," in an interview with US network Fox News, while accusing Israel of orchestrating violence, without providing evidence.

Araghchi contends the peaceful protests about economic hardship that began December 28 devolved into widespread violence between January 7 and 10 because the protests were infiltrated by external "elements who had a plan to create a big number of killings in order to provoke President Trump to enter into this conflict and start a new war against Iran."

Iran's Minister of Justice Amin Hossein Rahimi echoed that allegation, telling state news agencies that after January 7, "those weren't protests any longer" and anyone who was arrested on the streets then "was definitely a criminal."

A rights group said separately that the execution of an Iranian man arrested during the wave of protests, 26-year-old Erfan Soltani, would not take place as scheduled on Wednesday, citing relatives.

Late Wednesday, UN leadership announced a meeting of the Security Council Thursday for "a briefing on the situation in Iran," as requested by the United States.

Araghchi said the Iranian government was "in full control" and reported an atmosphere of "calm" after what he called three days of "terrorist operation."

Iran also struck a defiant tone about responding to any US attack, as Washington appeared to draw down staff at a base in Qatar that Tehran targeted in a strike last year.

Iran targeted the Al Udeid base in June in retaliation for US strikes on its nuclear facilities. Ali Shamkhani, a senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned Trump the strike showed "Iran's will and capability to respond to any attack."

Fears of possible US military action continued to rile the region. The British government said its embassy in Tehran had been "temporarily closed," while the US embassy in Saudi Arabia urged staff to exercise caution and avoid military installations.

Germany's Lufthansa on Wednesday said its flights would avoid Iranian and Iraqi airspace "until further notice" after the US threats against Iran.

Trump has threatened to intervene militarily in Iran several times since the protest movement that has shaken the country began in late December. The protests are the largest since the Islamic Republic was proclaimed in 1979.

Rights monitors say that under cover of a five-day internet blackout, Iranian authorities are carrying out their harshest repression in years against demonstrations openly challenging the theocratic system.

Iran's judiciary chief vowed fast-track trials for those arrested, stoking fears authorities will use capital punishment as a tool of repression.

In Tehran, authorities held a funeral for more than 100 security personnel and other "martyrs" killed in the unrest, which officials have branded "acts of terror."

G7 nations said Wednesday they were "deeply alarmed at the high level of reported deaths and injuries" and warned of further sanctions if the crackdown continued.

Monitor NetBlocks said Iran's internet blackout had lasted 144 hours. Despite the shutdown, new videos, with locations verified by AFP, showed bodies lined up in the Kahrizak morgue south of Tehran, wrapped in black bags as distraught relatives searched for loved ones.

Amnesty International accused authorities of committing mass unlawful killings "on an unprecedented scale," citing verified videos and eyewitness accounts.

The US-based Institute for the Study of War said authorities were using "an unprecedented level of brutality to suppress protests," noting reports of protest activity had sharply declined.

A senior Iranian official told journalists there had been no new "riots" since Monday, distinguishing them from earlier cost-of-living protests. "Every society can expect protests, but we will not tolerate violence," he said. Prosecutors have said some detainees will face capital charges of "waging war against God." State media reported hundreds of arrests and the detention of a foreign national for espionage, without giving details.

Iran Human Rights, based in Norway, said security forces had killed at least 3,428 protesters and arrested more than 10,000.

## Another construction crane collapse in Thailand kills two, a day after fatal train derailment



NAKHON RATCHASIMA

A construction crane collapsed onto an elevated road near Bangkok, killing two people on Thursday.

The incident comes a day after another crane fell on a moving passenger train in northeastern Thailand and killed 32 people.

The crane collapsed at part of the road project in Samut Sakhon province, trapping two vehicles in the wreckage, according to the government's Public Relations Department.

The work on an extension of the Rama 2 Road expressway — a major artery leading from Bangkok — has become notorious for construction accidents, some of them fatal.

Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said on Thai TV Channel 7 that two people had died. It was unclear if anyone else had been trapped in the wreckage.

There was uncertainty about the number of victims because the site is still considered too dangerous for search teams to enter, said Suchart Tongteng, a rescue worker with the Ruamkatanyu Foundation.

"At this moment, we still can't say whether another collapse could happen," he said, citing dangling steel plates. "That's why there are no rescue personnel inside the scene,

only teams conducting on-site safety assessments."

At the site of Wednesday's train derailment, the search for survivors ended, Nakhon Ratchasima Gov. Anuphong Suksumnit said. Three passengers listed as missing were presumed to have gotten off the train earlier, but that was still being investigated.

Officials believed 171 people had been aboard the train's three carriages, which were being removed from the scene Thursday. The crane that fell, crushing part of the train, was a launching gantry crane, a mobile piece of equipment often used in building elevated roadways.

Police were still collecting evidence and interviewing witnesses and have not pressed charges, provincial Police Chief Narongsak Promta told reporters. South Korea's Foreign Ministry reported a South Korean man in his late 30s, was among the dead.

The high-speed rail project where the accident occurred is associated with the plan to connect China with Southeast Asia under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

In August 2024, a railway tunnel on the planned route, also in Nakhon Ratchasima, collapsed, killing three workers.

Anan Phonimdaeng, acting

governor of the State Railway of Thailand, said the project's contractor is Italian-Thai Development, with a Chinese company responsible for design and construction supervision.

A statement posted on the website of the company, also known as Italthai, expressed condolences to the victims and said the company would pay compensation to the families of the dead and hospitalization expenses for the injured.

Transport Minister Phiphat said Italthai was also the lead contractor on the highway project where Thursday's accident took place, though several other companies are also involved.

The rail accident had already sparked outrage because Italthai was also the co-lead contractor for the State Audit Building in Bangkok that collapsed during construction last March during a major earthquake centered in Myanmar. The building's collapse was the worst quake damage in Thailand and about 100 people were killed.

Twenty-three individuals and companies have been indicted, including Italthai's president and the local director for the company China Railway No. 10, the project's joint venture partner. The charges in the case include professional negligence and document forgery, and Thailand's Department of Special Investigation has recommended more indictments.

The involvement of Chinese companies in both projects has also drawn attention, as has Italthai and Chinese companies' involvement in the construction of several expressway extensions in and around Bangkok where several accidents, some fatal, have occurred.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said Wednesday the government was aware of the rail accident and had expressed condolences.

## NEIR 2026 Flag-Off Highlights Role of Youth, HAM Radio and Regional Connect



### OUR CORRESPONDENT

The North East India Rally (NEIR) 2026 was flagged off from College of Agriculture, Pasighat on January 14, marking the start of an ambitious journey of Pasighat and beyond. The event brought together policymakers, academics, social leaders, and young campaigners under one platform. The flag-off ceremony was attended by North East Council, Shillong secretary Satinder Kumar Bhalla, Vice Chancellor of Central Agricultural University, Imphal Dr Anupam Mishra, Arunachal Pradesh

MP Tapir Gao, and several other dignitaries. Bhalla praised the organisers for their vision and hard work. He said initiatives like NEIR play a key role in connecting the Northeast and spreading awareness at the grassroots level. He assured that the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) would always encourage such meaningful efforts. Bhalla also lauded the six-member NEIR 2026 team from Kolkata and specially appreciated the HAM Radio team of Tripura for their effective and disciplined communication support.

MP Tapir Gao interacted with Biswadeep Gupta and the rally team during the programme. He suggested that future editions of NEIR should cover border areas of Arunachal Pradesh to highlight ground realities and national integration. Gupta assured that the team would make sincere efforts to include these regions in the next edition.

Dr Anupam Mishra encouraged the NEIR team and shared insights into similar outreach activities conducted during NEIR programmes in Gangtok. He highlighted how such campaigns help bridge gaps

between institutions, communities, and young minds.

All the speakers appreciated the sustained efforts of the KRC Foundation, led by its managing trustee and CEO Biswadeep Gupta. During the interaction, Gupta briefed the dignitaries about the objectives of the NEIR campaign, the role of Amateur and HAM Radio in disaster response and connectivity, and the concept of the "5 E's for success," which form the backbone of the initiative.

With its formal flag-off, NEIR 2026 has set the tone for a journey focused on awareness, connectivity, and youth engagement across the Northeast.

## NEIR Team Meets Entrepreneur Bhagyawati Bhuyan



### OUR CORRESPONDENT

The NEIR team had a warm and meaningful interaction with noted woman entrepreneur Bhagyawati Bhuyan at the Women Development Centre, Moridirgha, North Lakhimpur. The meeting highlighted the growing strength of women entrepreneurship in the Northeast.

NEIR advisor Prof Dr. Sukamal Deb interacted at length with Bhuyan, who received the team with traditional Bihu

pithas, setting a warm and cultural tone for the visit. On behalf of the NEIR team, she was encouraged for her inspiring work and long journey as an entrepreneur. Similar words of encouragement were shared by the managing trustee and CEO of the KRC Foundation, Biswadeep Gupta.

During the interaction, strong emphasis was laid on the importance of women-led enterprises and their role in economic growth and social change.

Bhuyan showcased her handmade products and explained how her initiative has grown over the years. She currently

provides employment to around 1,100 women, mostly from rural and marginal backgrounds.

On behalf of the NEIR team, advocate Kh. Gajendra Singh, Biswadeep Gupta, and Prof. Deb were also honoured during the programme. Gupta felicitated Bhuyan and discussed mutual ideas for collaboration.

He shared inputs on how her products could be better marketed across different parts of the Northeast region.

The meeting remained lively and fruitful, marked by open discussion, exchange of ideas, and shared commitment towards empowering women through entrepreneurship.

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### VOLUNTEERS REGISTERS @ NEIR 2026

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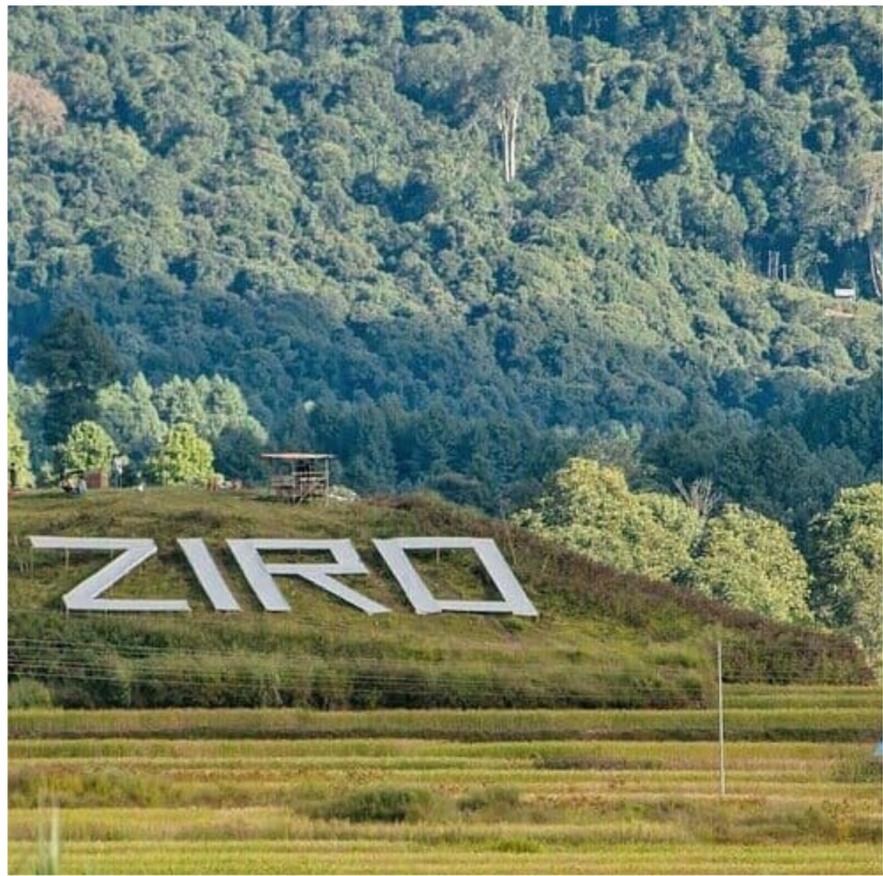


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## Ziro Valley: Where the Apatani way of life shapes Arunachal's most enduring landscape



**Z**iro Valley sits quietly at 1,500 metres in Arunachal Pradesh, surrounded by pine-covered hills and wide, green basins of rice fields that seem carefully arranged rather than imposed on the land. Nothing here feels rushed. The valley opens slowly, revealing a landscape shaped as much by human care as by nature.

This is one of the oldest settled regions in the state. Long before roads and administrative boundaries, the Apatani tribe built a way of life that still defines Ziro today. Their presence is not decorative or symbolic. It is structural. The valley looks the way it does because of how the Apatanis chose to live.

The most striking feature of Ziro is its wet rice cultivation system, practiced permanently rather than seasonally. Unlike shifting or slash-and-burn cultivation common in many hill regions, the Apatanis developed a method that integrates paddy farming with fish rearing. Narrow channels guide water through terraced fields. Fish move with the flow, fertilising the soil naturally while providing food. It is efficient, sustainable, and centuries old. No modern sustainability framework comes close to matching its quiet intelligence.

The Apatani villages reflect the same thinking. Houses built from bamboo and wood sit close together, conserving space and heat. Paths run between fields and homes without cutting the land apart. Traditionally, Apatani women were known for facial tattoos and nose plugs, practices that have largely faded but remain an important part of the community's historical identity. Even as customs evolve, the core relationship between land, food, and community remains intact.

Ziro is also a cultural landscape in the truest sense. It is not just scenic. It tells a story of coexistence. This is why the Apatani cultural landscape has been placed on UNESCO's Tentative List for World Heritage Sites. Spread across roughly

32 square kilometres of cultivated land within a much larger plateau, it represents a living system rather than a preserved relic. Conservation efforts here are not about freezing time. They are about protecting a functioning model of ecological balance.

The town itself is administratively centred in Hapoli, known locally as Hao-Polyang. This is where government offices, markets, and transport links converge. Yet even here, the pace is unhurried. Ziro remains more of a valley than a town, more lived-in than developed.

Beyond the fields and villages, the surrounding forests add another layer to the valley's character. Talley Valley Wildlife Sanctuary

throughout this region are less about adrenaline and more about immersion. Trails wind through mist, birdsong, and thick undergrowth. Wildlife sightings are unpredictable, but the sense of isolation is reliable.

Smaller landmarks dot the region. Siikhe Lake offers still water and quiet reflection, often visited by locals rather than tourists. Pine Grove is a simple stretch of forest that becomes a gathering space for picnics and walks. Meghna Cave Temple, believed to be thousands of years old, adds a spiritual dimension to the valley, blending local belief with ancient myth.

Once a year, Ziro changes its rhythm. September brings the Ziro

erding into an internationally recognised celebration. Set against open fields and hills, the festival draws independent artists from across India and abroad. What makes it distinct is not scale but setting. Music here does not overpower the valley. It fits into it. When the festival ends, Ziro returns to its usual calm without residue.

The best time to experience the valley is during spring or autumn. March and April bring fresh green growth and clear skies. September and October balance mild weather with cultural activity. Winters can be cold but sharp, and summers are gentle compared to the plains.

Reaching Ziro requires intention. It lies about 115 kilometres from Itanagar, 112 kilometres from North Lakhimpur in Assam, and roughly 96 kilometres from Naharlagun railway station.

An Advanced Landing Ground maintained by the Indian Air Force serves the area, underlining its strategic as well as geographic significance. The journey is winding, often slow, and entirely worth it.

What sets Ziro apart is not that it is untouched. It is that it has been touched carefully. Development exists, but it has not erased local logic. Modern education, administration, and tourism coexist with traditional farming and village governance. That balance is fragile, and the valley's future will depend on how well it is protected from careless expansion.

Visitors often describe Ziro as a hidden paradise. That phrase is overused, but here it carries some truth. The valley does not advertise itself loudly. It rewards patience and curiosity. What this really means is that Ziro does not perform for the visitor. It continues its life, and you are allowed to observe.

At a time when many destinations trade depth for visibility, Ziro offers something rarer. A place where culture is not curated for display, where nature is not separated from daily life, and where sustainability is not a slogan but a habit. The valley stands as quiet evidence that another way of living has always existed, and in Ziro, still does.



lies nearby, dense with pine, bamboo, and subtropical growth. Treks

Music Festival, an outdoor event that has grown from a niche gath-



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



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



**11 JAN**  
**Barak Valley Conclave**  
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.  
 Includes: KCCs, and D'governance and reform for better governance. Local government and private sector synergy. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



**12 JAN**  
**River-Climate Conclave**  
 Climate Change will influence on Climate Change, pollution and river flooding. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and protection of River Barak. Training & Geography competitive and certification. River Barak, Climate Change.



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



**10 JAN**  
**Media Conclave**  
 Media Conclave: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.  
 Media Conclave: Workshops, Seminars, and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.  
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**BROADCAST PARTNER**



**REGISTER HERE**

Contact: [info@krcfoundation.org](mailto:info@krcfoundation.org)  
 WP: 0721300019



**BARAK FESTIVAL 2025**  
 PAINTING CARNIVAL  
 NE CULTURAL FEST  
 E-SPORTS  
 FILM FESTIVAL | EXHIBITION  
 BOOK CLUB | WORKSHOPS | LOCAL  
 RAMP RAMP | RECORDS LIVE

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

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

**10 JAN**  
**Band Night**  
**Musical Night**



Contact: [info@krcfoundation.org](mailto:info@krcfoundation.org)  
 WP: 0721300019

**10-12 JAN**  
**E-Sports**  
 Full-Blown Demos | 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



**STUDENT INTERNSHIP**  
 Discover valuable experience and learn more about the Industry.

- Outreach Executive
- Event Management
- Programme Coordinator

**APPLY NOW** | WP: 0721300019 | [www.krcfoundation.org](http://www.krcfoundation.org)

**10-12 JAN**  
**Book Bank**  
 #NoLike Campaign | Book Bank | e-books | e-audio | e-video

**Book Club**  
 Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books

**Painting Carnival**  
 Water Colour and other Drawing Competition



**Watch Out! Film Festival**