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## PERSPECTIVE

**“The greatest remedy for anger is delay” ~ Seneca**

## Guwahati’s ACA Stadium Hosts Seven International Matches in Five Months

**IMPHAL**  
The Foothills Naga Co-ordination Committee (FNCC) on Tuesday strongly refuted allegations by certain Kuki civil society organisations claiming that a village named “K. Songlung” was burned in Manipur, terming the assertions false, misleading and baseless. In a press statement issued on January 27, the FNCC clarified that no recognised village was targeted and asserted that the structures dismantled were illegal farmhouses linked to illicit poppy cultivation in the Waphong Inthan area. According to the committee, the action followed sustained efforts by the Zeliangrong United Front to curb large-scale poppy cultivation and its associated activities. It stated that at least three farmhouses used by individuals engaged in poppy farming were dismantled. The FNCC categorically rejected claims by organisations such as the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), the Sadar Hills Chiefs’ Association, and the Committee on Tribal Unity that a village had been set ablaze, maintaining that no settlement named “K. Songlung” exists in official records. Citing the Manipur (Hill Areas Village Authority) Act, 1956, the FNCC pointed out that a village must have a minimum of 20 households to be legally recognised. It further stated that neither K. Songlung nor K. Songlung (II) is listed in the Manipur Gazette. What existed at the site, it said, were temporary structures erected for poppy cultivation on what it described as Naga ancestral land.

### WHO SAID WHAT

**“As per the rules, the discussions should revolve around the Budget only. The President will address the joint session of the Parliament at the beginning of the Budget session. After that motion on vote of thanks on the President’s speech will hold where all parties will participate. The government will always be happy to hear any suggestions.”**

**Kiren Rijiju**

## Padma Awards 2026: Five from Assam honoured, Northeast makes strong mark on national list

**GUWAHATI**  
Ahead of the 77th Republic Day celebrations, five individuals from Assam, along with several others from across the Northeast, have been named among the 113 recipients of the Padma Awards 2026, reflecting growing national recognition of grassroots contributions and community-driven work from the region. From Assam, Satriya exponent Haricharan Saikia, sculptor Nuruddin Ahmed, silk expert Jogesh Deuri, Karbi folk music exponent Pokila Lektepi, and former Union Minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Kabindra Purkayastha (posthumously) have been conferred the Padma Shri award. Their selection recognises sustained contributions across culture, art, craft, music and public life. Beyond Assam, the Northeast features prominently on this year’s honours list. Sangyusang S. Pongener of Nagaland, Techi Gubin from Arunachal Pradesh, Yumnam Jatra Singh of Manipur, Naresh Chandra Dev Varma from Tripura, and Hally War from Meghalaya have also been selected for the prestigious civilian award. Officials said the recognition highlights the increasing national acknowl-

## Republic Day: Manipur Governor calls for peace, harmony and upholding constitutional values



**IMPHAL**  
Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Sunday called for strengthening peace and harmony and reaffirming commitment to the ideals of the Constitution as the state observed the 77th Republic Day amid a challenging security situation. The Governor unfurled the national flag and took the salute at the ceremonial parade, which featured march-past contingents from the state armed forces, Assam Rifles, Central Armed Police Forces, ex-servicemen, the NCC, Sainik School, as well as school and college students.

An official said the parade symbolised discipline, service and the spirit of collective nation-building. The celebrations also included martial arts demonstrations, colourful tableaux by various government departments and cultural performances showcasing Manipur’s rich heritage. Addressing the gathering, Bhalla urged citizens to uphold constitutional ideals. “As we celebrate Republic Day, let us resolve to uphold the ideals of our Constitution, strengthen peace and harmony, and work with dedication towards inclusive development and social justice,” he said.

Manipur has been under President’s Rule since February last year following prolonged ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities that erupted in May 2024. The violence has claimed at least 260 lives and rendered thousands homeless. In a statement, the Governor said Republic Day was an occasion to reaffirm faith in the values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity that form the foundation of the nation. Highlighting Manipur’s cultural heritage, Bhalla said the state’s unity in diversity, along with the courage, resilience and talent of its people—particularly in sports, arts, culture and public service—continues to inspire the country. “Let this Republic Day renew our commitment to nation-building and to ensuring progress, dignity and opportunities for all,” he added. Meanwhile, Manipur Police said 13 officers and personnel of the state police were conferred with medals on the occasion of Republic Day.

## No Village Burnt, Only Illegal Poppy Farmhouses Razed: Kuki CSO Claims

**IMPHAL**  
The Foothills Naga Co-ordination Committee (FNCC) on Tuesday strongly refuted allegations by certain Kuki civil society organisations claiming that a village named “K. Songlung” was burned in Manipur, terming the assertions false, misleading and baseless. In a press statement issued on January 27, the FNCC clarified that no recognised village was targeted and asserted that the structures dismantled were illegal farmhouses linked to illicit poppy cultivation in the Waphong Inthan area. According to the committee, the action followed sustained efforts by the Zeliangrong United Front to curb large-scale poppy cultivation and its associated activities. It stated that at least three farmhouses used by individuals engaged in poppy farming were dismantled. The FNCC categorically rejected claims by organisations such as the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), the Sadar Hills Chiefs’ Association, and the Committee on Tribal Unity that a village had been set ablaze, maintaining that no settlement named “K. Songlung” exists in official records. Citing the Manipur (Hill Areas Village Authority) Act, 1956, the FNCC pointed out that a village must have a minimum of 20 households to be legally recognised. It further stated that neither K. Songlung nor K. Songlung (II) is listed in the Manipur Gazette. What existed at the site, it said, were temporary structures erected for poppy cultivation on what it described as Naga ancestral land. Providing historical context, the FNCC said the land originally belonged to an Inpui village named Tamphoimon. During the Kuki rebellion of 1918, the Inpui inhabitants vacated the area, which

has since remained under the jurisdiction of Waphong Inthan Inpui village. The committee alleged that the occupants of the dismantled farmhouses arrived only in 2017, constructed temporary shelters and began poppy cultivation on surrounding hill slopes, leading to deforestation and illegal land claims. The FNCC maintained that repeated warnings and appeals by the state government and various organisations to halt poppy cultivation were ignored. It asserted that the recent action was solely directed against illegal farmhouses associated with poppy plantations and not against any recognised village or civilian settlement. While expressing regret over the loss of property, the committee reiterated its firm opposition to illicit poppy cultivation, describing it as a serious social, moral and security threat to the region. The statement also disputed claims by Kuki organisations that no poppy cultivation existed in the area, noting that joint state and central security forces had destroyed poppy plantations there on November 2, 8 and 20, 2025. The FNCC urged the government to address what it described as illegal territorial expansion and continued poppy cultivation, warning that failure to act reflected a breakdown of governance. Appealing for restraint, the committee called on all groups to refrain from spreading misinformation and urged respect for ancestral boundaries to maintain peace. It also cautioned that a 24-hour ultimatum reportedly issued by SAHILCA could escalate tensions and undermine social harmony. Reaffirming its commitment to safeguarding land, law and order in Naga areas, the FNCC emphasised the need for dialogue and restraint to ensure peaceful coexistence among communities in Manipur.

## “Not About Northeast, Only About Targeting Congress”: Kharge on Patka Row

**NEW DELHI**  
Congress president and Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, on Tuesday slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the controversy surrounding Rahul Gandhi and the traditional Northeastern Patka, accusing the ruling party of deliberately manufacturing the issue to malign the Congress and insult the Opposition ahead of elections. Addressing the controversy, Kharge clarified that Rahul Gandhi had worn the Gamosa (Patka) respectfully and had only folded it and kept it aside while eating. “They are unnecessarily making an issue out of it,” he said, rejecting allegations that the Congress had insulted the culture of the Northeast. He asserted that the BJP was politically weaponising the matter to target the Congress rather than genuinely expressing concern for regional sentiments. Kharge strongly condemned what he described as repeated acts of institutional disrespect, alleging that the Opposition was deliberately humiliated during the Republic Day celebrations. He highlighted that two senior Opposition leaders were made to sit in the third row during the parade, calling it an insult not only to individuals but also to democratic values and the Constitution. “I am the senior-most leader. How can they make me sit in the third row alongside state ministers? By doing so, you have insulted me, the Congress, and the Constitution,” Kharge said, expressing deep resentment over the treatment of Opposition leaders. He also alleged that Opposition members were made to wait in line along with state ministers to meet the President of India, which he described as a conscious attempt to undermine constitutional propriety.

## Insurgents open fire on Assam Rifles base near Indo-Myanmar border in Arunachal



**ITANAGAR**  
An Assam Rifles Company Operating Base (COB) at Ranglum village in Arunachal Pradesh’s Changlang district came under fire from armed insurgents on Monday morning, triggering a fierce exchange of gunfire, officials said. According to defence sources, the COB was targeted from two different directions at around 8.45 am, even as the country was marking its 77th Republic Day. Assam Rifles personnel responded swiftly, effectively retaliating against the attackers. A counter-insurgency operation is currently underway in the area. “No casualties have been reported from either side so far,” an official said, adding that additional columns deployed in nearby locations have been alerted and reinforcements rushed to the area. Operations to cordon off the region

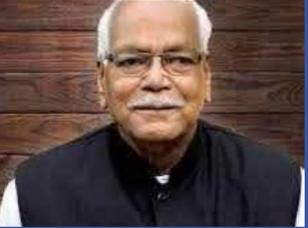
and neutralise the insurgents have also been launched as part of heightened security measures. The identity of the militant group involved in the attack is yet to be confirmed, with Assam Rifles officials stating that detailed information is awaited. Changlang Superintendent of Police Kirli Padu said police teams have been dispatched to the border areas to collect inputs. “We are yet to receive detailed information from the Assam Rifles,” the SP said. Ranglum is a remote border village located close to the India-Myanmar international boundary, near border pillar number 168. Arunachal Pradesh shares a 520-km unfenced border with Myanmar, making the region vulnerable to cross-border militant movement. Security agencies recalled that a few months ago, militants belonging to the NSCN-IM (YA) faction had launched a stand-off attack on the Hedman Camp in Changlang district, which was foiled due to a swift and coordinated response by alert troops. Officials said such prompt action has repeatedly thwarted insurgent attempts and helped maintain security force dominance in the sensitive border region.

## Assam wants accountability, not photo-ops’: Pawan Khera

**NEW DELHI**  
Congress leader Pawan Khera on Monday praised Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi for what he described as consistent solidarity with the people of the Northeast during multiple crises, while sharply criticising the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for engaging in what he termed “diversionary tactics” instead of addressing core governance issues. In a post on social media platform X on January 26, Khera shared photographs of Rahul Gandhi interacting with people from Northeastern states and said the Congress leader had demonstrated “character and moral courage” by standing with the region at a time when, he alleged, the Union government remained indifferent. Highlighting the Congress party’s engagement with the Northeast, Khera accused the BJP-RSS ecosystem of eroding peace, dignity and cultural respect in the region. He referred to the prolonged violence in Manipur, the unresolved issues surrounding the death of singer Zubeen Garg, and the continued demand for justice by the family of Angel Chakma as instances of what he called systemic

failure and neglect. “Rahul Gandhi stood with Manipur when it was burning, while the Prime Minister remained absent and silent. He stood with the family of Zubeen Garg, which is still awaiting answers, and with Angel Chakma’s family, still crying out for justice,” Khera said. The Congress leader also launched a direct attack on Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, accusing him of prioritising optics over governance. Khera alleged that the Chief Minister relied on photo opportunities while evading accountability on substantive issues confronting the state and the region. “It is no surprise that Himanta Biswa Sarma hides behind photo-ops. The Northeast demands peace, justice, jobs and respect for its rich and complex culture—values that the BJP-RSS ecosystem has actively undermined,” he said. Emphasising the political mood in Assam, Khera asserted that voters were no longer influenced by symbolism alone. “Assam is not voting for optics. It is voting for accountability. That is why the BJP is resorting to diversionary tactics,” he added.

## Late Kabindra Purkayastha Honoured with Padma Shri, Pride for Barak Valley and BJP North East



**OUR CORRESPONDENT SILCHAR**  
It is a proud moment for the BJP North East and the Barak Valley as late Kabindra Purkayastha has been awarded the Padma Shri posthumously. The honour recognises his lifelong contribution to public service and his work for the peo-

ple. Kabindra Purkayastha was known for his humility and discipline. He believed in clean politics and strong democratic values. Throughout his life, he worked closely with the people and focused on grassroots development. He played an important role in bringing governance closer to common citizens. His deep understanding of local issues and his commitment to public welfare earned him wide respect across the region. Leaders and citizens have remembered him as a man of integrity and vision. His selfless service has left a lasting mark on the Barak Valley. The Padma Shri award stands as a national recognition of his dedication and contribution. It also serves as an inspiration for future generations to serve society with honesty and commitment.

edgment of individuals from the region whose work has had a lasting social impact. Many of the awardees have worked quietly at the grassroots level, contributing to the preservation of heritage, social development and community welfare without seeking public acclaim. According to reports, this year’s Padma Awards aim to celebrate individuals who have acted as catalysts for social change, improving lives through long-term commitment, service and innovation rather than personal recognition. The Padma Awards, among India’s highest civilian honours, are announced annually on the eve of Republic Day and are presented in three categories—Padma Vibhushan for exceptional and distinguished service, Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of a higher order, and Padma Shri for distinguished service. The awards recognise achievements across a wide range of disciplines, particularly those involving public service, culture and social impact. Earlier in the day, nearly 1,000 personnel from the police, fire services, home guards and civil defence across the country were also named for gallantry and service medals on the eve of Republic Day, underscoring the government’s broader emphasis on recognising service and sacrifice.



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## LIVING CONSTITUTION

On January 26, India does not merely commemorate a date. It renews a responsibility. The Constitution of India, which came into force on this day in 1950, was never meant to be a ceremonial document-quoted in speeches, framed on walls, and ignored in practice. It was designed as a living framework of power and restraint, a moral compass for a fractured society, and a daily instruction manual for citizenship.

India did not begin its constitutional journey as a unified people. It emerged from centuries of invasions, empires, princely states, colonial exploitation, and cultural fragmentation. There was no single language, no single ethnicity, no single faith to bind it. What united Indians was not sameness, but suffering-and the will to govern themselves.

The framers of Indian constitution understood this. That is why they rejected the idea of India as a loose confederation. They created a Union-indestructible, yet flexible. States could be reorganized, borders redrawn, names changed-but the republic itself would remain intact. Unity, however, was not to be enforced by fear. It was to be protected by rights.

Fundamental Rights were not ornamental clauses. They were shields against the State. In a land where authority had long gone unquestioned, this was revolutionary. The Constitution reversed history: power would no longer descend as charity; it would rise as entitlement. Citizens would not beg for dignity-they would demand it.

Justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity were not slogans. They were instructions. Justice was to be social and economic, not merely legal. Liberty was to include thought, expression, belief, and movement. Equality was to confront centuries of hierarchy. Fraternity was to transform diversity from a weakness into a strength.

But the framers issued a warning: democracy is not self-sustaining.

A Constitution can design institutions, but it cannot guarantee conscience. Courts, legislatures, and commissions may form the architecture of democracy, but citizens are its electricity. When people disengage, democracy does not collapse-it decays. Quietly. Legally. Gradually.

That is why civic activism is not optional in a republic-it is essential.

Voting once every five years is not participation. Democracy is not a spectator sport. It demands constant vigilance: questioning power, monitoring institutions, defending rights, and refusing to normalize injustice. Without this, even the best Constitution becomes hollow.

Judicial review was placed at the heart of India's constitutional design for this very reason. In a true federation, it is not the legislature that has the final word on rights-it is the judiciary. Courts were not meant to be polite. They were meant to be uncomfortable. They were meant to restrain majorities, confront executives, and protect the powerless.

History has already shown why this matters.

During the Emergency of 1975, civil liberties were suspended, dissent was crushed, and censorship became law. It exposed an uncomfortable truth: elected governments can also become instruments of injustice. It was not elections that saved democracy-it was institutions, lawyers, journalists, and citizens who resisted.

That lesson remains urgent.

Across the world, democracies are being weakened not by coups, but by compliance. Not by tanks, but by technicalities. Laws are rewritten to concentrate power. Surveillance expands quietly. Protest is delegitimized. Critics are labelled enemies. And citizens are told this is normal.

It is not.

A constitutional democracy is not just about who rules-it is about how power is restrained. It is about what rulers cannot do. It is about what citizens can challenge. Without constant civic pressure, accountability collapses. Corruption flourishes. Arbitrariness becomes routine.

India's federal structure reinforces this principle. The country is not a monolith-it is a mosaic. From deserts to deltas, from mountains to mangroves, from hundreds of languages to thousands of traditions, India is united not by uniformity, but by consent.

The integration of the princely states was not merely territorial-it was moral. It replaced dynastic loyalty with citizenship. It replaced inherited authority with legal equality. It replaced obedience with rights. That transformation is not permanent. It must be defended daily.

This is where civic activism becomes constitutional duty.

Activism does not mean chaos. It means participation. It means informed debate. It means filing RTIs. It means questioning budgets. It means tracking policies. It means peaceful protest. It means legal challenge. It means journalism that investigates, not flatters. It means citizens who refuse to be passive.

Accountability is not a gift from governments. It is extracted by citizens.

A republic does not survive on patriotism alone. Flags and anthems do not protect liberty. Only an alert, educated, and engaged public does. When people stop asking questions, power stops answering them.

Republic Day, therefore, should not be reduced to parades and platitudes. It should be a day of civic introspection. Are our institutions independent-or merely influential? Are our laws protective-or merely punitive? Are our courts accessible-or merely symbolic? Are our citizens informed-or merely outraged?

A republic is sustained not by emotion, but by constitutional morality-the belief that power must answer to principle, not popularity. The Constitution does not promise perfection. It promises process. It promises that injustice can be challenged. That authority can be questioned. That dissent is not betrayal. That minorities are not expendable. That dignity is not conditional.

But none of this is automatic. Every right survives only if exercised. Every freedom survives only if defended. Every institution survives only if scrutinized. Silence is not neutrality. It is permission.

Every generation must re-earn its republic. Not through slogans, but through scrutiny. Not through obedience, but through participation. Not through silence, but through courage. On this Republic Day, the most patriotic act is not celebration-it is vigilance. It is remembering that the Constitution is not a relic of the past. It is a challenge to the present. And its greatest test is not whether it exists-but whether we actively protect it.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe."

Albert Einstein

# DOLES TO DIGNITY: A Needonomics Case for Middle-Class Self-Respect in Goodness Mode

PROF. MADAN MOHAN GOEL

The Needonomics School of Thought—a Kurukshetra-based think tank—firmly believes that Bharat's journey towards becoming a Viksit Bharat cannot rest merely on the widening reach of free goods, subsidies, and doles. While such measures may offer temporary relief, sustainable peace, progress, and prosperity demand a deeper engagement with human dignity—particularly the dignity of the middle class, which serves as the ethical and stabilizing backbone of the economy.

Development that alleviates material deprivation but erodes self-respect risks hollowing out the social capital that binds a nation together. Growth without dignity may expand consumption, but it weakens character, responsibility, and social cohesion. A simple yet powerful real-life story from a local community illustrates this truth with striking clarity.

A Story of Hunger, Help, and Honor

In a modest neighbourhood lived a schoolteacher—respected, sincere, and quietly devoted to shaping young minds. Her life was simple and disciplined. Due to adverse circumstances, she often struggled to arrange even one proper meal a day. Yet when a free food distribution drive began in her area, she never joined the long queues.

This was not denial of need, nor misplaced pride. It was self-respect. Her fear was not hunger, but the silent humiliation that frequently accompanies public charity—especially when need is displayed, counted, and judged.

Ironically, some of the young boys managing the free distribution were her former students—children she had once taught not only academic subjects, but also values of dignity and empathy. When they noticed her absence and learned of her situation, they responded with wisdom that many policy frameworks overlook.

They discontinued the free distribution and announced instead a special offer: vegetables and rice at ₹10 per kilogram—far below market prices, yet not free.

The results were immediate and revealing. Long queues of habitual free riders disappeared. In their place stood a new queue—of people with genuine needs rather than opportunistic greed. Middle-class families, daily wage

earners, and the teacher herself now stood in line without shame or fear. They were not begging; they were buying.

The teacher purchased her essentials, paid the amount, and returned home with her dignity intact. When she opened the packet later, she discovered the money she had paid placed discreetly inside. The boys had quietly done this for everyone—offering support without spectacle, assistance without assault on self-worth.

The Needonomics Perspective: Needs with Dignity

Needonomics draws a clear distinction between need and greed, support and dependency, empowerment and erosion of dignity. This story powerfully demonstrates that people do not resist help; they resist humiliation.

The middle class, in particular, suffers silently. Often earning too much to qualify for poverty schemes yet too little to live securely, it remains largely invisible in welfare design. When support systems are framed only for the "poor," the middle class is gradually pushed toward precarity—forced one day to choose between hunger and self-respect.

Indiscriminate and highly visible free distribution may provide short-term relief, but it creates long-term distortions:

Weakening the user-pay principle

Encouraging dependency and free-riding

Stigmatizing genuine need

Excluding the self-respecting middle class

By contrast, the ₹10-per-kg model respected the psychology of dignity. Even symbolic payment transformed charity into transaction, beneficiaries into customers, and queues of shame into lines of self-confidence.

The Middle Class: Bharat's Silent Pillar

The middle class is not merely an income bracket; it is a cultural and ethical force. Teachers, nurses, clerks, small traders, junior professionals, and self-employed workers sustain Bharat's values of honesty, effort, and aspiration. They pay taxes, educate their children, care for elders, and rarely ask for handouts.

Yet rising inflation, escalating education and healthcare costs, and limited access to targeted welfare are steadily squeezing this group. If neglected, today's middle class can easily become tomorrow's poor.

Needonomics therefore calls

for development policies that pursue three goals simultaneously:

Eradicate poverty

Prevent the middle class from slipping into poverty

Reduce inequality without destroying dignity

Ignoring any one of these leads to distorted and unsustainable development.

From a Free Culture to a Fair Culture

A mechanical culture of "free" goods corrodes social ethics. It blurs the line between need and entitlement and often rewards visibility rather than vulnerability. A fair culture, by contrast, is anchored in:

User-pay principles with compassionate pricing

Cross-subsidization instead of blanket giveaways

Vouchers, rebates, or special pricing rather than doles

Quiet support that protects privacy and pride

The boys in the story practiced Needonomics in action—targeting need without labeling poverty, helping without humiliating, and giving without creating dependency.

Dignity as a Development Indicator

As Bharat aspires to become a developed nation, GDP growth alone is not enough. We must ask deeper questions:

Can people meet basic needs without losing self-respect?

Do welfare systems empower—or embarrass?

Is the middle class expanding—or eroding?

Are we nurturing responsible citizens—or passive beneficiaries?

True development is not only about producing and distributing more goods, but about cultivating better values. Dignity must be treated as a core development indicator, alongside income, health, and education.

Conclusion: Growth with Goodness

The story of the teacher and her students is not a sentimental anecdote; it is a powerful policy lesson. It proves that compassion and economics need not be at odds. With sensitivity, creativity, and ethical intent, support systems can uplift without humiliating.

Needonomics therefore calls for a decisive shift:

From free goods to fair pricing

From charity to dignity

From populism to purpose

From dependency to self-reliance

If Bharat truly seeks to become

Viksit, it must ensure that no one goes hungry—and no one is forced to stand in a queue that strips them of self-respect. Only then can peace, progress, and prosperity be achieved in the Goodness Mode.

A Viksit Bharat must be not only richer—but also more dignified—anchored in growth with goodness, as envisioned in the Needonomics framework.

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

The traditional Halwa ceremony, which marks the final stage of preparations for the Union Budget 2026-27, was held on Tuesday at the Budget Press in North Block.

The ceremony took place in the presence of Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary.

The Halwa ceremony is an important ritual that signals the beginning of the 'lock-in' period for officials involved in preparing the Budget.

Once the ceremony is completed, these officials remain cut off from outside contact to ensure complete confidentiality until the Budget is presented.

The Union Budget 2026-27 is scheduled to be presented in Parliament on February 1.

During the ceremony, the Finance Minister was joined by secretaries of various departments under the Ministry of Finance and other senior officials associated with the Budget-making process.

FM Sitharaman also visited the Budget Press to review the final preparations and extended her best wishes to the entire team working on the Budget.

The government also announced that all Union Budget documents will be made available in digital format for easy public access.

These include key documents such as the Annual Financial Statement, also known as the Budget, the Demand for Grants and the Finance Bill.

"All Union Budget documents, including the Annual Financial Statement (commonly known as Budget), Demand for Grants (DG), Finance Bill, will also be available on the 'Union Budget Mobile App' for hassle-free access of Budget documents by Members of Parliament (MPs) and the general public in a digital accessible mode," Ministry of Finance said in a statement.

Ministry of Finance



**DOLES TO DIGNITY: A  
NEEDONOMICS CASE FOR  
MIDDLE-CLASS SELF-RESPECT  
IN GOODNESS MODE**



## Meghalaya sets \$16 billion economy target by 2032; growth rate nearly doubles national average

### SHILLONG

Meghalaya has emerged as India's second-fastest growing state, recording a real Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) growth of 9.66 per cent in the financial year 2025-nearly double the national average-Governor Phagu Chauhan announced during the 77th Republic Day celebrations on Sunday.

The northeastern state, which had a \$5 billion economy in 2022, is on track to triple its economic size to \$16 billion by 2032 under its flagship Mission 10 initiative. Since 2018, Meghalaya's GSDP has expanded by 102 per cent, despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are firmly on course to realising the government's vision of tripling the size of our economy by 2032, reflecting our commitment to resilient and inclusive development," the Governor said in his Republic Day address.

Highlighting new growth drivers, the Governor said Meghalaya has positioned itself as a pioneer of India's concert economy, hosting more than seven major

concerts that generated a 5.6-fold return on a public investment of Rs 24 crore and created over 5,600 direct jobs.

Tourism has also witnessed a sharp upswing, with visitor numbers rising 33 per cent to 16 lakh in 2024, compared to 12 lakh before the pandemic. The government projects tourist arrivals to touch 20 lakh by 2028. Ongoing investments include the development of the Sohra Tourism Circuit and the Rs 300-crore Taj Umiam Resort and Spa, described as one of the region's most iconic hospitality projects.

The Governor said the state has secured private investments exceeding Rs 1,800 crore, citing Varun Beverages Ltd's Rs 300-crore bottling plant in North Garo Hills, which was set up within a year and has generated over 500 jobs. Meghalaya, which had no five-star hotels in 2018, now has two operational premium properties, with three more under development.

Infrastructure development has gained momentum with the announcement of the Rs 22,000-crore Shillong-Sil-

char Greenfield High-Speed Corridor. Over the past seven years, around 3,500 km of roads have been built under the PMGSY, while a record Rs 2,200 crore was sanctioned for state road schemes last year.

Shillong is also emerging as an IT hub for the Northeast. Phase 1 of the Shillong Tech Park currently employs over 1,000 youth, while Phase 2, nearing completion, is expected to create jobs for an additional 3,000. The state recently hosted the region's first Artificial Intelligence Summit and launched initiatives such as the BHASHINI Hackathon to develop language models in Khasi and Garo.

In the healthcare sector, facilities in the state have received National Quality Assurance Standards certification for the first time. Shillong Medical College, Meghalaya's first government medical college, welcomed its inaugural batch of students in September 2025.

Agriculture's contribution to the GSDP has doubled over the past five years. Under the Floriculture Mission

launched in 2024 with an outlay of Rs 240 crore, the government aims to support 3,100 floriculturists and generate more than 12,400 employment opportunities.

Education spending has risen from Rs 2,045 crore in 2018 to Rs 3,654 crore. The state cabinet has approved revised structured pay for over 23,000 SSA and ad hoc teachers, effective April 1, 2026. Captain Williamson Sangma State University began its first academic session in 2025 with 14 departments and 568 students.

Through the PRIME initiative, the state has supported 480 entrepreneurs with funding totalling Rs 146 crore, including 230 women entrepreneurs. Between 2023 and 2025, the programme incubated 277 start-ups and generated more than 5,000 jobs.

The Governor said water coverage under the Jal Jeevan Mission has reached 83.31 per cent-above the national average-providing tap water to over 5.37 lakh households. Under PMAAY (Gramin), 84 per cent of rural houses were constructed in the last two years.

## Tripura government focused on all-round development to boost peace and prosperity: Governor

### AGARTALA

Tripura Governor N. Indrasena Reddy on Sunday said the state government has been working towards all-round development with the aim of accelerating peace and prosperity in the northeastern state.

Addressing the 77th Republic Day celebrations at the Assam Rifles ground here, the Governor said special emphasis has been placed on the agriculture sector, which supports the livelihood of nearly 70 per cent of Tripura's population.

He said flagship schemes such as PM-KISAN and the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana are benefiting lakhs of farmers and contributing to efforts to double farmers' income. "These initiatives are helping transform rural livelihoods and strengthen the state's agrarian economy," Reddy said.

Highlighting infrastructure development, the Governor noted that Tripura currently has six national highways covering a total length of 923 km. He added that four more national highways have been sanctioned in principle by the Centre,

which is expected to further improve connectivity and economic activity.

Reddy said the state government is also tapping Tripura's tourism potential to drive growth. He referred to the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement with Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) for the development of a five-star hotel at the historic Pushpabata Palace.

He further said tourism-related projects worth Rs 179 crore, funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), are under implementation. In addition, the Centre is funding the construction of a replica of 51 Shakti Pithas at Bandower in Gomati district at an estimated cost of Rs 97 crore.

On education, the Governor said steps are being taken to improve quality and expand higher education opportunities. He noted that the Council of Ministers has approved a proposal to upgrade Women's College, Agartala, into a Women's University, and that a technical university will be established soon. Three new general degree colleges have also begun functioning in three subdivisions, he added.

## Assam civil society group urges united Opposition to defeat BJP in 2026 polls

### GUWAHATI

Amid the prevailing pre-election climate in Assam, Assam Nagarik Sammilan, a collective of like-minded citizens' organisations on Saturday called for a united opposition to defeat the BJP in the 2026 Assembly elections, alleging growing anarchy and arbitrary governance under the BJP-led state government.

In a statement, the group said civil society had been compelled to intervene in electoral politics due to what they described as the authoritarian functioning of the present dispensation.

They alleged that the state government no longer listens to public opinion and functions solely on the will of the Chief Minister.

The group accused the government of stoking fear around identity issues while simultaneously handing over Assam's land, rivers, forests, and mineral resources to a few large corporate houses.

According to them, companies linked to major industrialists have acquired tens of thousands of bighas of fertile agricultural and forest land, while small contracts, petty trade, and local businesses have increasingly fallen under the control of BJP-RSS-backed syndicates from outside the state.

Serious concerns were raised over the ongoing Special Summary Revision (SR) of the electoral rolls. They alleged that lakhs of minority voters whose families have lived in Assam for generations have had their names deleted for political reasons, while outsiders were being allowed to vote as long as they were identified as "Hindu." They claimed this had effectively dismantled the rule of law in the state. Warning that Assam's identity and democratic fabric were at stake, they said if the BJP-RSS combine was not removed from power in 2026, the state would be left with anarchy, lawlessness, and unchecked corporate plunder.

## Nagaland among India's most peaceful states, says CM Neiphiu Rio

### KOHIMA

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Monday said the state has remained one of the most peaceful in the country over the past several years, attributing the situation to a stable law and order environment and the absence of major security concerns.

Delivering his Republic Day address at the Nagaland Civil Secretariat Plaza here, Rio said the latest Crime in India 2023 report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has ranked Nagaland among the safest states in India.

The Chief Minister credited the sustained peace to proactive policing and continued efforts by the state police to strengthen enforcement capabilities and ensure public safety.

He said the Nagaland Police have stepped up their response to emerging and new-age crimes by developing a robust cybercrime framework, actively using nation-

al cyber platforms and intensifying action against financial frauds and online offences.

Highlighting the state's crack-down on narcotics, Rio said a sustained and vigorous campaign has been launched to dismantle drug trafficking networks operating in Nagaland.

Over the past year, Nagaland Police seized around 230 kg of NDPS substances and nearly one lakh units of synthetic drugs. A total of 135 NDPS cases were registered, leading to the arrest of 218 persons, he said, underscoring the government's firm resolve to curb drug trafficking and protect communities from drug-related harm.

Reaffirming the government's broader development agenda, the Chief Minister said Nagaland is committed to making concerted efforts across sectors to realise the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, in line with development initiatives being pursued across the country.

## Why PM Modi disregards LoP's position: Congress' Gaurav Gogoi on R-Day seating row

### GUWAHATI

Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi on Tuesday targeted the Centre over the seating of Leader of Opposition (LoP) Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge in the third row during the 77th Republic Day celebrations held in the national capital.

Gogoi called it disrespectful to the constitutional position of the LoP.

A day earlier, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi attended the Republic Day parade at Delhi's Kartavya Path. However, their placement in the third row has sparked a political row.

Speaking to ANI, Gogoi said, "The protocol to be followed towards the Leader of Opposition during the Republic Day event could not be seen yesterday. This has happened repeatedly. Only PM Modi can answer - Why he disregards the respectable position of the LoP while he calls Parliament a temple of democracy."



Further, Gogoi criticised the BJP after it accused Rahul Gandhi of "disrespecting the culture and people of the North-East" for not wearing a Patka at the Republic Day Home reception.

"When Congress leaders showed that the things they are raising in Rahul Gandhi's context also apply to Rajnath Singh, the BJP gets upset. I want to say that we should not get involved in politics like this. And even today, in the Northeast, we can clearly see the track records of PM Modi and Rahul Gandhi. Whenever there is

a problem in the Northeast, it is always Rahul Gandhi who is visible, not PM Modi," Gogoi said.

Earlier, the BJP accused Rahul Gandhi of "disrespecting the culture and people of North-East" by "choosing not to wear Patka," despite President Droupadi Murmu's requests at the Home reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan on the occasion of Republic Day.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma strongly condemned Rahul Gandhi's actions, which he believed "reinforced a perception of disregard towards

the North." As per BJP leaders, the Patka was worn by everyone at the Home reception, including President Murmu, PM Modi and foreign dignitaries.

"Times may change, but the attitude of the de facto supremo of the Congress party, Mr Rahul Gandhi, regrettably appears unchanged. In an act that was deeply insensitive and insulting to the people of the entire North East, Mr. Gandhi chose not to wear the traditional Patka, a symbol of the region's rich cultural heritage, at the reception hosted by the Hon'ble President of India this evening," the Assam CM said in a post on X.

"From the President and the Prime Minister to foreign dignitaries, everyone wore the Patka with respect and pride. Mr. Gandhi alone stood apart, reinforcing a perception of disregard towards the North East. Such conduct explains why his party has lost the trust of the region and much of the country. Yet, this repeated insensitivity continues," he added.

## Over 1.7 lakh declared illegal foreigners in Assam, only 467 deported: Governor



### GUWAHATI

Only 467 of the nearly 1.7 lakh persons declared illegal foreigners in Assam have been repatriated to their respective countries so far, Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya said on Monday.

Unfurling the national flag at Khanapara on the occasion of the

77th Republic Day, the Governor said that since their inception, Foreigners' Tribunals in the state have been referred around 4.35 lakh cases of suspected nationality till October 31 last year.

"Of these, more than 3.5 lakh cases have been disposed of, resulting in nearly 1.7 lakh people being declared illegal foreigners from the

specified territory. However, only 467 illegal foreigners have been repatriated to their country of origin through the process of deportation," Acharya said in his address.

Highlighting border security measures, the Governor said that 14 border outposts and 14 patrol posts are currently operational along the India-Bangladesh border in Cachar, Sribhumi, Dhubri and South Salmara districts, in close coordination with the Border Security Force (BSF) and local police.

He said the enhanced deployment has strengthened Assam's second line of defence against illegal infiltration and trans-border crimes.

Acharya also noted that Assam has emerged as a national front-runner in the implementation of the three new criminal laws - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)

and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA).

"As per assessments by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Assam has ranked first among all states in the implementation of the new criminal laws," he said.

Referring to the 29th state-level crime review held in November 2025, the Governor said the state has recorded a significant improvement in its crime scenario. The crime rate per lakh population declined from 379 in 2021 to 121.6 in 2025, while crimes against women dropped sharply to 4,426 cases in 2025 from 10,546 cases in 2024.

The Governor further said that under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs' prison modernisation project, work is underway to establish a high-security jail at Hajo in Kamrup district with a capacity of 150 inmates.

## Multi-crore recruitment scam unearthed in Guwahati, nearly 40 job aspirants duped

### GUWAHATI

Following the exposure of a major recruitment scam in Morigaon a few months ago, another multi-crore job racket has come to light in Guwahati, with nearly 40 government job aspirants allegedly cheated, police said on Monday.

Cases have been registered at two different police stations in the city, and investigators believe the number of victims could rise as the probe progresses. Preliminary findings suggest the scam was operated by a well-organised network, with possible links extending beyond Guwahati.

Sources said the racket may involve individuals with access to government departments, including law-enforcement agencies. However, police said no conclusions have been drawn at this stage. "We are neither confirming nor ruling out the involvement of government officials at this moment. All possible angles are being investigated," a police source said.

One accused, identified as Bankikanta Medhi, has been arrested in connection with the case. Police are scrutinising his bank transactions and call records to trace the money trail and identify other members of the network. Officials in the Home department said several crucial leads have already emerged, and more arrests are likely in the coming days.

According to investigators, the victims were promised jobs largely in Grade III and Grade IV posts in government departments, on the lines of appointments made through the Assam Direct Recruitment Examination (ADRE). Each aspirant allegedly paid a substantial sum, believing they were securing assured government employment.

"The stakes are very high in this case. As the investigation deepens, more details and beneficiaries of the racket are expected to surface," a senior official said.

The Guwahati case follows a similar recruitment scam uncovered in Morigaon, where fraudsters had reportedly collected around ₹25 lakh from each candidate by promising jobs linked to the Tata semiconductor project. Several arrests were made in that case, including that of a college lecturer, and a court had ordered the attachment of property belonging to one of the accused. Police officials warned that fake recruitment rackets are on the rise across Assam. "A number of fraudulent job scams are operating in the state, targeting gullible aspirants," a senior Assam Police officer said, adding that large-scale government recruitment drives have also created opportunities for fraudsters to exploit the hopes of unemployed youth.

## Assam CM outlines plans to build express corridors between Dibrugarh, Guwahati and between Guwahati and Siliguri

### DIBRUGARH

On the occasion of the 77th Republic Day, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday unfurled the National Tricolour at Khanikar Playground in Dibrugarh.

He offered his floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi, other freedom fighters and martyrs who made supreme sacrifices that shaped India's independence.

The Chief Minister also paid his homage to BR Ambedkar and other stalwarts associated with the Constituent Assembly that drafted the Constitution of India.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma also said that conferment of the Padma Awards on five personalities from Assam, Union Minister Kabindra Purkayasthya (posthumously), Haricharan Saikia, Jogesh Deuri, Pokhila Lektheipi and Nuruddin Ahmed has made every Assamese proud.

He said that their services and contributions epitomised selfless service and cultural pride.

"From grassroots heroes to custodians of our rich heritage, their exemplary contributions will continue to inspire generations to work for the betterment of society. The entire state of Assam is immensely proud of its achievements," he said.

### Quest!

**A room without books is like a body without a soul.**

The Chief Minister, on the occasion, referring to the background of the framing of the Constitution, mentioned Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Motilal Nehru, former Assam Chief Minister Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi, and others.

"The Constitution is the soul of Indian democracy. The Constitution gives India a federal system and guides the country to work for balanced development across all regions through decentralised governance," he said.

He said that, as Chief Minister, he has taken an oath under the Constitution and remains firmly committed to leading Assam forward with steady, determined, and uninterrupted progress.

He noted that a decade ago, Independence Day and Republic Day often saw strikes and boycotts.

"Times have changed, and people across the state now participate in these National Festivals with spontaneous enthusiasm. On 30 January, Union Home Minister Amit Shah will lay the foundation stone for the state's second Legislative Assembly complex, to be built at a cost of about Rs 300 crore.

This step will give new momentum to Upper Assam. The government has requested the Chief Justice of India to establish a circuit bench of the Gauhati High Court in Dibrugarh," the Chief Minister said.

The Chief Minister said that Assam's administrative and communication framework took shape in Dibrugarh.

"The state's industrial development also began there, which strongly influenced As-

sam's overall growth. However, during the rule of previous Congress governments, neglect, apathy, and misgovernance stalled industrial growth and created serious economic problems. Under the vision, ideals, and economic foresight of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Assam has moved forward and opened a new chapter of economic revival," he said.

Citing Reserve Bank of India data, the Chief Minister said that over the past five years, Assam has emerged as the fastest-growing state economy in the country.

"Gross State Domestic Product has also risen rapidly, and in less than a decade, the size of the state's economy has nearly tripled. February last year, the Advantage Assam 2.0 infrastructure and investment summit secured investment commitments of more than Rs 5 lakh crore, with projects worth nearly Rs 3 lakh crore already moving toward implementation," he said.

He further said that, as a representative of this resurgent Assam, he attended the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, from 19 to 24 January.

"Through this meeting, Assam received new investment commitments worth about Rs 1.5 lakh crore. Assam's development involves more than building infrastructure. It also links deeply to Assam's identity," he said.

He noted that the influx of people from East Bengal has had a major impact on the state's demographic structure.

Comparing the 2011 census with the census scheduled for 2027, he said the share of



## Students call for protest outside UGC office in Delhi as 'new regulations would create chaos on campuses'



NEW DELHI

Students from upper caste communities called for a protest outside the University Grants Commission headquarters in Delhi on Tuesday, saying that the new regulations issued by the commission could lead to chaos on campuses.

Those behind the protest call have appealed for unity from the student community, urging them to say "No to UGC discrimination" and requesting them to gather in large numbers to register their opposition.

The new rules notified by the UGC on January 13 - the Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions Regulations, 2026 - have sparked widespread criticism from general category students who argue that the framework could lead to discrimination against them.

Under the new regula-

tions, introduced to stop caste-based discrimination in colleges and universities, the UGC has asked institutions to set up special committees, helplines and monitoring teams to handle complaints, especially from SC, ST and OBC students.

Alokrit Tripathi, a PhD student from Delhi University, said that the new rules will create complete chaos in colleges as the burden of proof will now be completely shifted on to the accused, and there were no safeguards for wrongly accused students.

"The new regulations are draconian in nature. The definition of victim is already predetermined. Victim can be anyone in the campus," Tripathi said.

"With the proposed Equity squads, it will be akin to living under constant surveillance inside the campus," he said, adding that students of various Delhi colleges are likely to

join the protest.

The UGC regulations have kick-started discussions across the country, drawing reactions from students, teachers and social organisations in several states.

While the government said the changes aim to bring greater fairness and accountability to higher education institutes, many critics fear they may deepen social divisions and pose fresh challenges on university campuses.

According to a poster calling for protest, the demonstration will be a peaceful gherao of the UGC office.

"It's now or never, unity is strength," it read, urging students from upper castes to participate in the protest.

Several social media posts have urged other students to participate, calling the protest a crucial moment to speak up for their rights and concerns.

NEW DELHI:

India and the European Union (EU) have successfully concluded negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Monday.

He said the trade deal, from the Indian perspective, is balanced and forward-looking, which will help in better economic integration of India with the EU. It is expected to propel trade and investments in both economies.

"Negotiations have been successfully concluded. The deal has been finalised," Agrawal said.

Legal scrubbing of the FTA text is underway, and efforts are being made to complete the remaining processes and sign the pact at an early date. The deal is expected to be signed this year and may come into effect early next year.

Implementation of the deal will take time, as it requires approval from the EU Parliament, while in India, only the nod of the Union Cabinet is needed.

The pact has been finalised after 18 years of negotiations, with talks initially launched in 2007. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has described this free trade agreement (FTA) as "the mother of all deals" the country has signed so far.

The FTA is likely to provide duty-free access to a number of Indian goods from labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, chemicals, gems and jewellery, electrical machinery, leather, and footwear. The EU's tariffs on Indian goods are about 3.8 per cent on average, with labour-intensive sectors attracting about 10 per cent import duty. India's weighted average duty on EU goods is about 9.3 per cent, with particularly high duties on automobiles (35.5 per cent), plastics (10.4 per cent), and chemicals and pharmaceuticals (9.9 per cent).

In an FTA, both sides reduce or eliminate import duties on over 90 per cent of goods traded between them. The pact also liberalises norms to promote trade in services sectors such as telecommunications, transportation, accounting, and auditing.

The conclusion of the negotiations comes ahead of the India-EU summit, where the free trade agreement, along

with a strategic defence pact and a mobility framework, is expected to be key outcomes.



An announcement on the conclusion of talks on the ambitious free trade deal and finalisation of the strategic defence pact as well as the mobility framework are set to be the main deliverables at the India-European Union summit talks on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will host European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa at the summit that is expected to produce a broader vision by the two sides to navigate the geopolitical flux triggered by Washington's policies on trade and security.

Costa and von der Leyen graced the 77th Republic Day celebrations at the Kartavya Path as chief guests.

"A successful India makes the world more stable, prosperous and secure. And we all benefit," Von der Leyen said on Monday.

The top EU leader last week said India and the European Union are on the cusp of a "historic trade agreement" that would create a market comprising two billion people, accounting for almost a quarter of the global GDP.

The EU and India had first launched negotiations for the free trade agreement

in 2007, before the talks were suspended in 2013 due to a gap in ambition. The negotiations were relaunched in June 2022.

The FTA is expected to bring a qualitative change in deepening the overall bilateral ties in a range of sectors.

The broad focus of the summit will be on trade, defence and security, climate change, critical technologies and strengthening the rules-based global order.

From left, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President of the European Council Antonio Costa, President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and MoS Sanjay Seth during the 77th Republic Day Parade, in New Delhi.

Besides firming up the free trade agreement, the two sides are set to unveil a defence framework pact and a strategic agenda at the summit.

India and the European Union have been strategic partners since 2004.

The proposed Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) will facilitate deeper defence and security cooperation between the two sides, officials said.

The SDP will bring interoperability in the defence domain and will open up avenues for Indian firms to participate

in the EU's SAFE (Security Action for Europe) programme.

The SAFE is the EU's Euro 150 billion financial instrument designed to provide financial support to member states to speed up defence readiness.

At the summit, India and the EU are also set to launch the negotiations for a Security of Information Agreement (SOIA).

The SOIA is expected to boost industrial defence cooperation between the two sides.

The memorandum of understanding on facilitating the mobility of Indian workers to Europe is expected to be another key outcome of the summit.

It will provide a framework for advancing mobility initiatives by EU member states with India, the officials said. France, Germany and Italy are among the European nations that have migration and mobility partnerships with India.

The two sides are also expected to ink a number of agreements to provide for deeper cooperation in several other sectors.

They are also likely to deliberate on the pressing global challenges, including the Russia-Ukraine war.

While the two sides don't see eye-to-eye on everything, they do share a core set of interests which include having a stable international order, European officials said last week.

The summit will also be an opportunity to discuss with India "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine", they said.

President Costa will reiterate the message that this war represents an existential threat for Europe and poses a direct challenge to the rules-based international order and that it has clear consequences also in the Indo-Pacific, the officials noted.

The ties between India and the EU have been on an upswing over the last few years.

The EU, as a bloc, is India's largest trading partner in goods. For the financial year 2024-25, India's total trade in goods with the EU was worth about USD 136 billion, with exports around USD 60 billion and imports at USD 60 billion.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Not normal to tolerate Pak's continued use of terror as instrument of state policy: India at UNSC

UNITED NATIONS

In a strongly worded retort in the UNSC, India said it is not normal to tolerate Pakistan's continued use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy, as New Delhi hit back at Islamabad's envoy for advancing a "false and self-serving" account of Operation Sindoor.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, delivered a sharp response to comments made by Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad.

Ahmad spoke about Operation Sindoor, Jammu and Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty in his remarks at the UN Security Council open debate on Monday on 'Reaffirming International Rule of Law: Pathways to Reinvigorating Peace, Justice, and Multilateralism.'

Harish said Pakistan, an elected member of the Security Council, has a single-point agenda - to harm India and its people.

With Ahmad telling the Council that Pakistan's response to Operation Sindoor "established that there can be no 'new normal' based on coercion or impunity", Delhi slammed Islamabad, with Harish asserting that terrorism can never be normalised as Pakistan wishes to do.

"We have heard talk from the Representative of Pakistan about the new normal. Let me reiterate again that terrorism can never be normalised as Pakistan wishes to do. It is not normal to tolerate Pakistan's continued use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy," Harish said, adding that India will do whatever is required to protect and ensure the safety and security of its citizens.

"This hallowed chamber cannot



become a forum for Pakistan to legitimise terrorism," Harish said.

Harish said Pakistan's envoy "advanced a false and self-serving account" of Operation Sindoor, launched by India in May last year, targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the April 22 Pahalgam attack that killed 26 civilians. "The facts on this matter are clear. Pakistan-sponsored terrorists killed 26 innocent civilians in a brutal attack in Pahalgam in April 2025. This august body itself called for holding the perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and brought to justice. That is exactly what we did," Harish said. Harish's reference was to the press statement issued by the Security Council in April last year.

In the statement in which the 15-nation body had condemned in the strongest terms the terrorist attack in Pahalgam and had "underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice", with the Council stressing that those responsible for these killings should be held accountable. Harish underscored that India's actions in Operation Sindoor were measured, non-escalatory, and responsible, and focused on dismantling the terrorist infrastructure and disabling terrorists. "Till May 9, Pakistan was threatening more attacks on India. But on May 10, the Pakistani military called our military directly and pleaded for a cessation to the fighting," he said, adding that the destruction caused

to multiple Pakistani airbases by the Indian operation, including images of destroyed runways and burnt-out hangars, is in the public domain.

Hitting out strongly at Pakistan for raising the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, Harish said Pakistan has no locus standi to comment on matters that are internal to India.

"The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has been, is, and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India," he said.

On the Indus Waters Treaty, Harish said India had entered into the agreement 65 years ago in good faith, in a spirit of goodwill and friendship.

"Throughout these six and a half decades, Pakistan has violated the spirit of the Treaty by inflicting three wars and thousands of terror attacks on India. Thousands of Indian lives have been lost in Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks," he said.

In the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, Harish said India was "compelled to finally announce that the Treaty will be held in abeyance until Pakistan, a global epicentre of terror, credibly and irrevocably ends its support for cross-border and all other forms of terrorism." Further, India asserted that Pakistan is well advised to introspect about the rule of law.

"It could start by asking itself how it has let its armed forces engineer a constitutional coup through the 27th amendment and giving life-time immunity to its Chief of Defence Forces," a reference to the 27th Constitutional Amendment passed in November last year under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif that gives Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir lifelong immunity from any legal prosecution.

## Europe funding war against itself through India trade deal, says US secy Scott Bessent



LONDON

The United States has accused Europe of indirectly financing the Russia-Ukraine war through its expanding trade ties with India, following the conclusion of a landmark free trade agreement between New Delhi and the European Union.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Europe may have reduced its direct energy imports from Russia, but continues to purchase refined oil products originating from Russian crude processed in India. This, he said, undermines Western efforts to weaken Moscow's energy revenues.

Bessent's remarks came as India and the EU finalised negotiations on a long-pending free trade agreement, expected to be formally announced on Tuesday.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has described the pact as the "mother of all trade deals."

Speaking to ABC News on Sunday, Bessent said that Washington has taken stronger steps to disrupt Russia's energy trade, including imposing steep tariffs on countries continuing to buy Russian oil.

"We have put 25 per cent tariffs on India for buying Russian oil," Bessent said. "Guess what happened last week? The Europeans signed a trade deal with India."

"Just to be clear," he added, "the Russian oil goes into India, the refined products come out, and the Europeans buy the refined products. They are financing the war against themselves."

The Trump administration has imposed tariffs of up

to 50 per cent on Indian goods, including penalties linked to New Delhi's continued purchases of Russian oil.

Bessent said the US has made greater economic sacrifices than its European partners while working to bring the Russia-Ukraine conflict to an end.

Under President Donald Trump's leadership, Bessent said, the United States would "eventually end" the war.

The EU-India free trade agreement, negotiations for which began in 2007, aims to deepen economic ties between the two regions at a time of growing global trade disruptions, partly driven by US tariff policies.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is currently in India and attended the 77th Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi as chief guest.

## NEIR Team Pays Tribute to 1857 Martyrs at Malegarh War Memorial

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**OUR CORRESPONDENT**  
SRIBHUMI: The Malegarh War Memorial at Latu in Karimganj district

stood quiet and solemn on Monday as members of the North East Integration Rally (NEIR) paid tribute to unsung heroes of India's first war of independence. On the occasion of the 77th Republic Day, the NEIR team, led by its managing trustee and CEO Biswadeep Gupta, visited the historic site near the India Bangladesh border. The memorial honours 26 In-

dian soldiers of the 34th Native Infantry who laid down their lives during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. The martyrs were killed while resisting British forces led by Major Byng. Their bodies were later cremated at the very spot where the memorial now stands. The place remains a powerful reminder of early resistance against colonial rule in the Barak Valley region. During the visit, the NEIR mem-

bers offered floral tributes and observed a moment of silence to honour the sacrifice of the sepoys. Silchar Press Club general secretary Shankar Dey and noted cultural activist Bhaskar Das were also present at the programme. Shankar Dey described the visit as a gesture to remember forgotten chapters of the freedom struggle and to pass their legacy on to future generations.

## NEIR REPUBLIC DAY PROGRAMME IN SRIBHUMI SENDS STRONG MESSAGE OF UNITY AND HOPE



### OUR CORRESPONDENT

#### SRIBHUMI

The 77th Republic Day on Monday became special in Sribhumi with the organisation of an NEIR programme that focused on unity, social harmony, and the future of the region. The event drew wide participation from students, teachers, social workers, and cultural organisers, turning the national day into a platform for dialogue and hope.

The programme was attended by chief guest, senior journalist, writer, and social thinker Satu Roy. Also present were KRC Foundations Managing Trustee and CEO Biswadeep Gupta, cultural organiser Bhaskar, Silchar Press Club General Secretary Shankar Dey, KRC members Biswajit Biswas, convener Abhijit Dey, Asit Dutta, journalist Arup Roy, the headmis-

stress of the host school, and other school authorities.

Speaking on the occasion, Satu Roy stressed the urgent need for such initiatives to unite the many communities living in the Barak Valley and adjoining areas. He called the NEIR rally a deeply humane step. According to him, programmes like this can slowly bring revolutionary change in the region by breaking walls of mistrust and identity-based divisions. He praised the organisers for reaching out to students and common people and said unity is the only way forward.

Biswadeep Gupta, in his address, spoke in detail about the vision behind NEIR 2026. He said the NEIR journey started from Kolkata on January 4 and will conclude on February 4. The aim is to integrate and unite nearly 200 different communities living in this region. He

mentioned that the Barak Festival was held last year, and in Sribhumi this year, the programme continued for five days, showing strong public support. Gupta said the focus is not only on culture but also on job creation, climate change awareness, and giving the youth a clear direction.

"There is always conflict among us. We keep fighting over identity," Gupta said. "At least we can unite and give a call for togetherness. Elders should stop fighting and create space for the younger generation to get jobs. We must say no to identity politics." He also highlighted that climate change is a key part of the NEIR campaign.

Nearly 400 students took part in the Sribhumi programme, which included awareness activities and an alpana competition. Gupta said the response from students made

the organisers proud and hopeful.

Shankar Dey, General Secretary of the Silchar Press Club, said journalists have always raised their voice against injustice. He praised Gupta for his positive thinking and continuous efforts to develop the region. Dey spoke about the discrimination faced by Bengalis in different places and said leaders like Gupta are working selflessly for the people. He added that Gupta is closely connected to almost every part of the region, rarely takes rest, and is always on the move. He wished the NEIR rally great success.

The event ended with the distribution of prizes among competition winners. Overall, the Sribhumi programme stood out as a strong call for unity, peace, and collective progress, perfectly reflecting the spirit of Republic Day.



## BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

**ACTIVITY PROGRAM**





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



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



**11 JAN**  
**Barak Valley Conclave**  
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley by different stakeholders.  
 Includes: NGOs, and Governmental institution for development, awareness, awareness, awareness, and awareness through participation through involvement of different stakeholders and institutions.



**12 JAN**  
**River-Climate Conclave**  
 Climate Change will influence on Climate Change, climate and environment. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and practical of River Basin Planning & Geography, environment and development in River Basin, 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.



**BROADCAST PARTNER**



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

**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: Media Conclave, Workshops, and the Fund, Talks and Conferences are part of the "Barak Festival 2025". Theme: "One for All, All for One".



**PAINTING CARNIVAL**  
**NE CULTURAL FEST**  
**E-SPORTS**  
**FILM FESTIVAL | EXHIBITION**  
 BOOK CLUB | AWARDS | GUEST | NEW BARRACK | RECORDS

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

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

**Barak Festival**  
**Band Night 10 JAN**  
**Musical Night 11 JAN**



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 & Media Talk | Exhibitions | Meet & Greet



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

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

**Painting Carnival**  
 Water Colour painting and Draw-Paint Campaign



**Watch Out!**  
**Film Festival**  
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