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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.

**Assam has become "India's fastest-growing state": Himanta**

**GUWAHATI**  
Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Wednesday that the state has emerged as the fastest-growing economy in India, with a 13% growth rate. Leading the first-ever delegation from the state to the World Economic Forum, the Chief Minister said that Assam is now ready to partner with global investors to build a modern future. Highlighting the state's new economic confidence, Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "India is going to be the third largest economy under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Assam has become the fastest growing economy and grown 13 per cent in the last 5 years" Earlier, the Assam Chief Minister highlighted the state's efforts to prepare its workforce for an increasingly automated and AI-driven future, citing skill development and industry-aligned training as key focus areas. In a post on X, the Chief Minister said that Assam, with its young demographic profile, is redefining workforce training by embedding industry-friendly curricula through initiatives such as the Assam Skill Development University. He noted that the state is developing strong use cases to adapt to technological transformation, including hosting one of the world's most digitally advanced manufacturing facilities.

"On Day 2 of the World Economic Forum, I had the privilege to share how Assam is preparing its workforce for an increasingly automated and AI-enabled environment. Given our young demography, Assam is rewriting the training playbook. The Assam Skill Development University, along with other initiatives, is embedding industry-friendly curricula and programmes at the heart of our efforts.

**WHO SAID WHAT**



"Before yesterday, the number stood at 68. However, yesterday itself, that figure did not hit 69, but jumped straight to 70, once during his opening statement at the White House press conference, and later during the Q&A session,"

Jairam Ramesh  
Congress leader

## Manipur Celebrates 55th Statehood Day Guv Highlights Dutiful Citizenship, PM Modi Reaffirms Support

**IMPHAL**

Manipur marked its 55th Statehood Day on Wednesday with a grand state-level celebration at the 1st Manipur Rifles Parade Ground in Imphal, emphasising civic responsibility, development, and the state's rich cultural heritage.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, addressing the gathering, underlined the importance of conscientious and law-abiding citizenship, calling citizens the greatest asset of any state. "It is the duty of every individual to respect the Constitution, uphold the rule of law, and contribute meaningfully to society," he said. Highlighting recent progress, the Governor pointed to several flagship projects inaugurated during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the state, reflecting sustained efforts toward development and public welfare.

The celebrations brought together



senior state officials, police and security personnel, students, and members of the public. Ceremonial events included a parade, march past, and cultural performances showcasing Manipur's artistic heritage and its journey since attaining full statehood in 1972. A total of 22 parade contingents participated in the march past, led by Parade Commander Ningthoujam Mandhunimai Singh, MPS. Officers were also honoured with Certificates of Commendation and Appreciation for outstanding service and performance.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

extended warm greetings to the people of Manipur, commending the state's cultural, artistic, and sporting contributions. In a message to Governor Bhalla, he praised Manipur's emphasis on women empowerment, environmental stewardship, and sustainable living, noting that the state has enriched India's national fabric for centuries. Emphasising the Centre's focus on the Northeast, Modi said the government's "Act East, Act Fast" approach since 2014 has accelerated development across sectors, with a substantial increase in Central assistance to Manipur. He saluted the people for their courage and unwavering faith in peace and progress, assuring continued support for the state's development journey.

Manipur attained full statehood on January 21, 1972, and the day is observed annually to commemorate the historic milestone, celebrating the state's unique identity and its contributions to nation-building.

**DIMAPUR**

The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) [NSCN (I-M)] on Tuesday alleged that a lack of political will and sincerity among Indian leaders, coupled with repeated attempts to frame the Indo-Naga political issue as a domestic matter, is threatening efforts to achieve an honourable and lasting settlement.

In an official statement, the NSCN (I-M) stressed that political dialogue between Indian and Naga leaders has been ongoing as two distinct entities for nearly three decades. The group criticised the use of labels such as "insurgents," "rebels," "terrorists," and "secessionists," saying such terminology does not address the core issues and only reflects "immaturity and double standards" among Indian authorities. Reiterating its long-standing position, the organisation described the Naga situation as stemming from the "invasion and

forced occupation of Nagalim by India and Myanmar," adding that the question of secession is irrelevant because there was no consensual union in the first place. The NSCN (I-M) also condemned past accords it described as "bogus" and warned against repeating previous mistakes in the peace process. The statement recalled that key demands, including recognition of a separate Naga national flag and a Naga constitution, remain non-negotiable. It emphasised that any agreements signed with other Naga factions outside the NSCN (I-M) would not be recognised, and insisted that future talks should take place at the highest level, ideally in a neutral third country. According to the group, these demands are essential to ensure an honourable and durable settlement that respects Naga identity, symbols, and political rights, highlighting the need for genuine and unconditional dialogue in ongoing peace negotiations.

## 78-Year-Old Woman Murdered Inside Imphal West Home, Brutal Killing Shocks Locality



**IMPHAL**

A 78-year-old woman was found brutally murdered inside her residence in Manipur's Imphal West district, triggering shock, anger and renewed concerns over the safety of elderly citizens living alone, police said.

The gruesome crime came to light on the afternoon of January 19 when the body of the victim was discovered hidden under a bed and wrapped in clothes at Singamei Oinam Thingel. The deceased has been identified as Oinam (ningol) Thoibi Devi, also known as Pishakcha, a resident of the locality.

According to family members, Thoibi Devi had been missing from her home and the neighbourhood since Saturday, raising concern among relatives and neighbours. Her younger sister, Oinam Bimola, said the family was alerted after locals reported that the elderly woman had not been seen for an entire day. Residents subsequently

checked the house, where they made the horrific discovery.

A team from Singamei Police Station, accompanied by forensic experts, rushed to the spot and conducted an inquest in the presence of an Executive Magistrate of Imphal West district. Preliminary findings revealed signs of extreme violence, with the victim reportedly sustaining multiple stab wounds on her face and body. Police said her throat had been slit and fingers of her right hand severed, indicating a brutal and premeditated attack.

Following the inquest, the body was shifted to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) morgue for post-mortem examination to determine the exact cause and time of death. Police have registered a case of murder and launched a detailed investigation to identify and apprehend those involved.

The killing has sparked widespread outrage in the area. An emergency meeting of local residents was held at the premises of Eikhoigee Club, Oinam Thingel, where community members strongly condemned the crime. The meeting resolved to form a Joint Action Committee (JAC), named the Joint Action Committee Against Brutal Killing of Oinam (ningol) Thoibi alias Pishakcha, to press for swift justice.

Residents also adopted a resolution demanding strict action against the perpetrator(s), including expulsion from the locality once those responsible are identified, reflecting the depth of anger and fear triggered by the incident.

## Security Forces Neutralise Three IEDs Near Indo-Myanmar Border in Manipur



**IMPHAL**

Security forces in Manipur on January 19 successfully defused three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) along the Indo-Myanmar border, officials said, averting a potential threat to both security personnel and civilian movement in the sensitive frontier region.

The IEDs were detected and safely destroyed in situ during an intensive area domination and sanitisation operation carried out near Border Pillars 72 and 73. The operation was launched as part of heightened vigilance along the international border.

Officials said security personnel conducted a systematic sweep of the area, leading to the recovery of the explosive devices concealed within the border zone. The timely detection and neutralisation of the IEDs prevented any possible sabotage or casualties, they added.

According to security agencies, the operation forms part of sustained efforts to curb cross-border infiltration and prevent subversive activities in the strategically important region.

Surveillance and patrolling along the Indo-Myanmar border have since been further intensified to maintain stability and thwart any attempts to disrupt peace, officials said.

## Amit Shah to visit Assam on Jan 30, lay foundation of Dibrugarh's 2nd Assembly

**DIBRUGARH**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is set to visit Assam on January 30, barely a month after his previous trip to the state, during which he inaugurated major infrastructure projects. The visit, confirmed by State Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika, will include laying the foundation stone of Assam's second Legislative Assembly complex in Dibrugarh and inaugurating 14 ponds and reservoirs designed for flood mitigation.

Speaking to the press while reviewing preparations, Hazarika noted the strategic importance of the visit in light of the state government's plan to develop Dibrugarh as Assam's second capital. "Since the Chief Minister has designated Dibrugarh as the second capital, a second Assembly complex is required," he said. In addition to the Assembly building, the phased development plan includes construction of a ministers' colony, an MLA colony, and the Speaker's residence.

Shah is also expected to address a public meeting in Dibrugarh, with officials estimating attendance could reach around one lakh people.

On the flood mitigation front, Hazarika recalled a proposal by the Home Minister nearly two years ago to construct ponds and reservoirs to manage recurring floods in Assam. "After detailed departmental studies, it was found that creating large ponds or reservoirs to store excess water can help reduce the Brahmaputra's water level. The stored water can later be used for irrigation," he said.



For the initial phase, 14 ponds and reservoirs have been approved at a cost of just under Rs 7 crore, with construction planned in districts including Dibrugarh, Sadiya, and Jorhat. Shah is scheduled to inaugurate these projects on the same day. The initiative follows Shah's 2024 proposal to establish 50 large ponds across the Northeast, part of a broader strategy to tackle flooding in the region, though some experts have suggested that restoration of existing water bodies could be a more effective approach.

Shah's last visit to Assam on December 29, 2025, saw the inauguration of several major projects, including the Jyoti-Bishnu Antartatik Kala Mandir, a new Police Commissionerate building, and an integrated command and control centre aimed at strengthening urban security.

## Rare 'Ghost Orchid' Rediscovered in Meghalaya After 175 Years

**GUWAHATI**

A rare, leafless orchid species last documented during the British colonial era has been rediscovered in Meghalaya's Khasi Hills after a gap of 175 years, marking the oldest recorded plant rediscovery in the state and highlighting the fragile biodiversity of Northeast India.

The orchid, *Chamaegastrodia vaginata* commonly referred to as a "ghost orchid" was rediscovered by researchers Yalatoor Mahesh, Rikertre Lytan and Ramalingam Kottaimuthu of the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong. The discovery was made during botanical field surveys conducted under the project Parasitic Angiosperms of Meghalaya and has been published in the scientific journal *Vegetas*.

The species was located at Lawsohtun in Upper Shillong, with its identity confirmed through detailed comparison with historical botanical descriptions and type specimens preserved at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

*Chamaegastrodia vaginata* was first collected in 1850 from Mamlou in the Khasi Hills by renowned botanists J.D. Hook-

er and Thomas Thomson. Since then, it had not been recorded in India, leading botanists to believe the species may have disappeared from the region.

Unlike most plants, the orchid is leafless and lacks chlorophyll, making it incapable of photosynthesis. Instead, it survives through mycoheterotrophy—a rare ecological strategy in which the plant derives nutrients from underground fungi associated with decaying organic matter in forest soils.

Researchers said this unusual lifestyle makes the species extremely vulnerable to habitat disturbance, as it depends on intact forest floors and stable microhabitats. Its small size and brief flowering period further increase the likelihood of it being overlooked during routine surveys.

The rediscovery, while confirming the orchid's continued survival in Northeast India, has also raised serious conservation concerns. Fewer than 25 mature individuals were recorded, all confined to an area of less than 20 square metres.

Based on its highly restricted distribution and small population size, the species has been provisionally assessed as Critically Endangered in India. At



present, Meghalaya is the only state in the country where the orchid is known to survive.

The orchid was found growing at elevations between 1,500 and 1,650 metres in damp, disturbed evergreen broad-leaved forests, under the canopy of tree species such as *Pinus kesiya*, *Castanopsis*, *Schima wallichii* and *Litsea*. Similar forest types also occur in parts of neighbouring Assam.

Researchers warned that urban expansion, habitat degradation and unregulated tourism in and around Upper Shillong pose direct threats to the fragile population. Even minor changes to soil structure or forest canopy could lead to the local extinction of the species.

Globally, *Chamaegastrodia vaginata* is known only from India and China, making the eastern Himalaya-Indo-Burma region a critical stronghold for its survival.

"Given the extremely limited number of individuals, this species warrants urgent conservation measures. Its future survival depends on the continued protection of its existing habitat," the researchers said.

## Sikkim wildfire near Indo-China border brought under control



**GANGTOK**

A massive wildfire that broke out near Kupup village in East Sikkim, close to the Indo-China border, was successfully contained on Wednesday following a coordinated operation by the Indian Army, local residents, and the civil administration. No casualties have been reported.

The blaze, which ignited on January 20 near the "Zero Line," raised immediate security concerns due to its proximity to key military installations along the border. Local witnesses reported that the fire spread rapidly across the rugged, high-altitude terrain, fuelled by strong winds and an ongoing dry spell. Loud explosions were reportedly heard at the site, adding to the urgency of the response.

Officials said that swift and

coordinated efforts by security forces and villagers prevented the fire from reaching inhabited areas or critical infrastructure. The Army attributed the surge in forest fires in the region to abnormally dry foliage and heavy winds. The incident came shortly after a similar fire on January 18 at Thambi View Point near the Nathula border.

Despite the challenging terrain and rapidly moving flames, authorities confirmed that the fire was contained without any loss of life or property damage. The successful operation was credited to the vigilance of border personnel and prompt cooperation from local communities.

Officials have cautioned that the prevailing dry weather continues to pose risks in Sikkim's sensitive Himalayan region, where forest fires are common during the winter season.

The containment highlights the importance of preparedness and joint civil-military efforts in managing emergencies along strategic border areas.



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## Growth plan: CAPEX, JOBS, SOCIAL SPEND

**D**omestic and international observers acknowledge India's medium-term economic prospects. FY27 is shaping up to be one of the strongest years for economic activity since FY19, at least according to high-frequency data. Policy actions during FY26 have driven this momentum and laid a foundation for growth.

An illustration is public capital expenditure. After a slowdown in FY25, government capex rebounded in FY26. Year-to-date, capital expenditure is 25 percent higher than the period last year, while revenue expenditure has grown by less than 2 percent. This divergence highlights the government's preference for investment-led growth, prioritising projects with financial returns, such as urban mobility, highways, airports, shipyards, and port infrastructure. The expansion of operational metro rail networks, the pace of highway construction, capacity additions at airports, and improvements in turnaround times at major seaports are documented.

In contrast, revenue expenditure—comprising subsidies and welfare spending—has been restrained. While such spending delivers societal returns, these benefits materialise over a longer horizon. For now, the government prioritises the creation of return-generating assets to revive economic momentum, even if early gains accrue unevenly across sections of the population.

It's a bet. India's growth strategy needs a 'dual engine' approach—capex for immediate momentum, social investment for long-term inclusivity. The external environment and India's capital supply make this challenging. Elevated interest rates and interest payments could burden the exchequer, manifesting in vicious cycles that impact growth. Yet this shift may be pragmatic, but only if it is paired with an assurance. Societal and developmental expenditure must scale up once global conditions stabilise and fiscal space improves for a government operating under a perennial deficit. There is a risk of entrenching a K-shaped growth trajectory. Large sections of the population—particularly in Aspirational Districts and parts of eastern India—may remain excluded from the gains of growth.

A comparative assessment of macroeconomic indicators over the past year underscores the economy's resilience. Retail inflation has declined by 390 basis points, driven by a correction in food prices, which have fallen by over 1,000 basis points since December 2024. This moderation has not come at the expense of farm incomes, as prices had risen from an exceptionally high base; annualised price growth for farm output has remained buoyant at 5 percent or higher.

Urban consumption sentiment has staged a recovery after a prolonged slowdown. The downturn began even before the pandemic in 2019. The Reserve Bank of India's Consumer Confidence Index—which captures households' willingness to spend—is now at a six-year high. This improvement is reflected in indicators of discretionary spending, such as passenger vehicle sales. Demand for entry-level cars has revived, and Bollywood box-office collections have reached a three-year high so far in FY26.

Consumption remains a pillar of India's growth model, accounting for 60 percent of the national income. India's domestic consumption base has historically acted as an economic 'iron dome' during global stress. This resilience was seen during the Asian Financial Crisis, the Global Financial Crisis or the taper tantrum. That buffer appears active again, even as global trade dynamics shift.

The blemish in an otherwise resilient macro backdrop has been the depreciation of the Indian rupee against the US dollar. This has occurred despite record-high foreign exchange reserves and a comfortable current account position. At this point, geopolitical considerations seem to drive the rupee's weakness more than economic fundamentals.

The rupee could regain some lost ground once a trade agreement with the United States materialises. Foreign investors may also regain confidence in Indian markets. Foreign investor risk appetite towards India appears constrained by strains in India-US relations. A trade deal could resolve this uncertainty.

The Finance Minister will present her ninth consecutive Union Budget against this backdrop. Like recent budgets, this one may prioritise public capex while trying to rein in revenue expenditure to control the fiscal deficit. Reducing public debt as a share of GDP is a constitutional responsibility, with positive spillovers for private investment and access to cheaper capital. India's sovereign rating upgrade from BBB- to BBB earlier in FY26 is conditional on sustained fiscal consolidation—especially as major economies, including the US, face rating pressures due to rising debt levels.

Emphasis on public capex in FY27 could catalyse the recovery in private investment that began in mid-FY26, supporting job creation—particularly in manufacturing sectors capable of absorbing India's semi-skilled workforce. By my estimates, domestic private investment announcements rose by 25 percent year-on-year in FY26, with nearly 75 lakh crore worth of stalled projects recommissioned, compared to 72 lakh crore in the previous year. FY27 could carry forward this corporate confidence, especially as domestic demand continues to strengthen.

FY27 could mark a shift towards broader regulatory easing aimed at lowering capital costs and stimulating private investment. Large-ticket consumer sectors—such as automobiles and housing—are likely to benefit as employment conditions improve and household cash flows strengthen. Gold prices may not see a correction in the near term, at least until the US mid-term elections.

To conclude, I align with the policy strategy of empowering corporate India. Catalysts include public capital expenditure, production-linked incentives, MSME credit guarantees and regulatory easing. A healthy private sector is needed to generate the scale of employment required for India to transition into a middle-income economy.

Leveraging India's demographic dividend is the need of the hour. While the country rightly takes pride in its large youth population—comparable to the entire US population—it also faces one of the highest levels of youth unemployment. This challenge has intensified each year. Investments in social development will yield a more productive workforce over the next decade or two. Still, the immediate imperative for a capital-deficient economy like India is job creation.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.”  
—Oprah Winfrey

# BJP-SENA BMC VICTORY CHURNINGS OVER MAYOR POST?



**T**he BJP-Sena alliance has ended the Thackeray family's 25-year control, since 1977 of the country's richest civic body, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, winning a majority with 118 out of 227 seats. Attention now turns to who will be Mayor, as political maneuvering continues. Having secured a clear majority with 118 of 227 seats (BJP 89 seats, Shinde-led Sena 29), the drama appears to be far from over. The Shiv Sena-UBT-Maharashtra Navnirman Sena-NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar alliance managed to win 72 seats, with Uddhav Thackeray team winning 65 seats, giving him hope to install his mayor in Mumbai! Illusional says Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, credited for the victory and affirms 'it will be a Mahayuti Mayor.' However, eyebrows are being raised with partner Eknath Shinde-led SS shifting its corporators in Mumbai to a luxury hotel, with reasons 'they can refresh' themselves after a hectic poll season or to undergo "orientation" course. But the question uppermost is whether it's an opportunity for Shinde to seek his pound of flesh and insist on a 'Marathi' Mayor. Indeed, the battle is not over yet!

Uncertainty hangs on another front. The Pawars which fought the polls together have been stumped by the BJP's victory in their bastion, Pune and Pimpri Chichwad. In Pune BJP won 119 seats, the NCP came a distant second with 27 seats, while its ally, NCP (SP), won only three, with Congress bagging 15 seats; in Pimpri the BJP bagged 84 seats of 128. The Pawars are to mull over the outcome. This apart, the two will need to decide whether to fight the upcoming Zilla Parishad elections together? Ajit Pawar, deputy CM, congratulated his partner in the Mahayuti, the BJP and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, for its performance. Said he, the take-away from this defeat 'is not to get

discouraged but to continue working.' The results represent a significant blow to Ajit Pawar's individual political standing in western Maharashtra. In fact, the defeat in these civic polls is being viewed as a critical signal ahead of the 2029 state Assembly elections, indicating a shifting dynamics within the Mahayuti alliance.

WB Stirring  
Mamata Banerjee's West Bengal has been hitting headlines this past week. One, Prime Minister Modi setting the tone for upcoming Assembly elections. Two, the high drama over political consultancy firm IPAC ED raids before the polls. On Saturday, Modi addressed a mega rally in Malda, wherein he flagged cross-border infiltration as a key issue, alleging it had altered the state's demographic balance and fuelled riots, plus TMC's 'thugery' and its 'politics of threatening the poor' would soon come to an end. Said he: Bengal 'is surrounded by BJP governments that stand for good governance. Now it's time for good governance in Bengal too.' He addressed another rally in Singur. Meanwhile, the ED raids on IPAC have unleashed a high-pitched political drama, reaching the Supreme Court. On Saturday, at a function to inaugurate a new building of Jalpaiguri Circuit Bench of Calcutta HC, Mamata reached out to CJI Justice Surya Kant to protect the Constitution, democracy and judiciary as the people were being wrongly targeted by 'agencies'. This presumably after the top court viewed her government's obstruction of ED officials as 'a serious issue'; stayed FIRs against ED officials and issued notice to the government. It also expressed displeasure over chaos before Calcutta HC saying 'We are very much disturbed... Today it is this HC, tomorrow it may be some other HC.' The matter is listed for February 3. Didi, has a lot on her plate to handle.

DMK-Cong TN Alliance?  
Speculation is rife over DMK-Con-

gress alliance for the ensuing Assembly elections. The past few weeks have seen rising tensions between the two partners over Congress demanding more number of seats, 40-50, significantly higher than the 25 it contested in 2021, and power sharing as currently no DMK ally holds a ministerial portfolio. For a party that has long accepted a junior-partner status in TN, the sudden assertiveness marks a clear departure from its earlier submissive approach. Worse, matters get further complicated as Praveen Chakravarty, Congress' data analytics head and a known confidant of Rahul Gandhi meets with TVK leader Vijay at his residence. In the backdrop there are hints even from TVK quarters of a possible alliance with the Congress! This apart, Chakravarty's recent post on X about the state's worsening debt position under the DMK government, has ruffled feathers. He claimed the state's outstanding debt is now higher than Uttar Pradesh's and the situation was 'alarming'. The timing raises eyebrows as DMK leader Kanimozhi has claimed that the Stalin government had transformed a debt-burdened TN into a developed and growth-oriented State. Clearly, DMK cadres are upset over Congress actions as they see it as breaching coalition discipline. However, the state Congress insists all is well and that talks with the DMK are on track and the alliance remains intact. Time will tell.

Rajasthan SIR Row  
A political row is brewing in Rajasthan following a video of a distressed Booth Level Officer (BLO) alleging political pressure to delete 450 voters during the ongoing SIR. The Congress has seized the opportunity and hit out at the ruling BJP for orchestrating 'mass voter deletions'. Apparently, reports are emerging from Jodhpur and Alwar among other districts wherein names of several Congress workers have been allegedly removed from electoral rolls and objections suddenly

being filed against 1,397 voters. Worse, most of the affected voters reportedly belong to Muslim community. In its response, the Congress has staged protests in several districts, and submitted memorandums to DCs and SDMs, and State CEO alleging a conspiracy to target voters with Congress leanings. Interestingly, alleged targeting of Congress takes another form. On Tuesday last, a BJP leader and former minister, Mahendrajeeet Malyia who signalled a return to the Congress was raided by the anti-corruption Bureau. He is said to have been upset with the government's functioning. The raid and the deletions of voters are bound to have a chilling effect. There can be no two

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

“... The part of military power that has come in handy, or which has delivered what was required to be delivered, is air power. It is very important that we focus on this part of the military if we want to be a force to reckon with. Whether it is getting people out of the conflict zone, whether it is to give a blow to terrorist infrastructure and their perpetrators, or whether it is attacking bases in Pakistan in a matter of a few hours to send a signal that enough is enough and bring them to their knees. It was the air power which did the trick, and that has to be remembered.”

AP Singh  
Air Force Chief Air Chief  
Marshal



opinions.

UP's Stray Dogs Feat  
Uttar Pradesh can boast of a success story. More so, as its none other than the Supreme Court making a mention of it in the last six months. Over 1 lakh stray dogs have been sterilised and vaccinated since 2019 resulting in stabilisation of stray dog population and reduction in human-dog conflicts. It's called the 'Lucknow model'. Recall, on stray dogs the Supreme Court had in August last ordered that while dogs would still be picked up, they will be released back upon sterilisation and immunisation. The UP government acted with alacrity. In a public-private partnership, the Lucknow Corporation and Human world for Animals India, got cracking and sterilised since 2019 over one lakh dogs of 1.35 lakhs, achieving coverage of 84%. The work is on two planks: Animal Birth Control (ABC) and community engaged. So, other than just sterilisation of stray dogs, Lucknow is placing equal weight on changing human behaviour. These include training and awareness sessions on how to engage with dogs, understand their body language when and when not to approach them and what and how to feed them. Guess, the pioneering work should have takers in other States, struggling with the menace of stray and dogs bites.



## At WEF Davos, Assam targets Rs 1 lakh crore MoUs to boost green energy and economy

GUWAHATI

Assam is set to sign Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) worth Rs 1 lakh crore during the ongoing World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, the Chief Minister's Office stated on Tuesday. The agreements are expected to enhance economic growth, generate employment, and strengthen allied sectors in the state.

The CMO noted that Assam had already secured MoUs worth Rs 5 lakh crore during the Advantage Assam 2.0 investment summit. The additional MoUs at Davos will focus particularly on green energy and emerging energy sectors, while also highlighting India's investment potential to a global audience and reinforcing the country's brand value.

Speaking to the press on the second day of his visit, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Assam has positioned itself as a reliable destination for investors and a key pillar of India's Act East Policy. "We invite the global community to explore the



opportunities Assam has to offer," he said. Earlier, Sarma participated in a panel discussion

on "Securing a Future-Ready Workforce for the Next Industrial Era", attended by governors from Oklahoma and Michigan, France's Minister Delegate, WEF Managing Director Kiva Allgood, and delegates from several other countries. Highlighting Assam's skill development initiatives, he said economic growth must be "fast but fair, advanced but accessible" and stressed that the state is restructuring its skilling framework to align with emerging industry demands. "Given our young demography, Assam is rewriting the training playbook. The Assam Skill Development University, along with other initiatives, is embedding industry-friendly curricula and programmes at the heart of our efforts," Sarma noted on a microblogging platform. On Wednesday, the Chief Minister is scheduled to address a session on travel and tourism, hold bilateral meetings, and engage with the media, as part of efforts to further strengthen Assam's global engagement and investment partnerships.

## Northeast Is 'Land-Linked', Not Landlocked: Lalrinpuii

AIZAWL/BENGALURU

Mizoram Health Minister Lalrinpuii on Monday said the Northeast should be described as a "land-linked" region rather than "landlocked", asserting that rapid improvements in connectivity and infrastructure have significantly transformed the region in recent years.

Addressing an international conference on the Northeast at Christ University in Bengaluru, the minister said the region is now well connected to the rest of the country through a range of major infrastructure initiatives. She highlighted the Gati Shakti-AatmaNirbhar Bharat programme, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the Act East policy as key drivers strengthening physical, economic and strategic linkages between the Northeast and neighbouring regions.

Quoting an official statement issued in Aizawl, Lalrinpuii said advances in digital infrastructure have further bridged longstanding gaps. She noted that the expansion of 4G and 5G services has enabled people in remote parts of Mizoram and the wider Northeast to access the same digital knowl-

edge, services and opportunities available in major urban centres such as Bengaluru.

The minister also underlined the Northeast's rich intellectual traditions and cultural heritage, describing them as valuable assets in the global knowledge economy. She said indigenous knowledge systems, including traditional medicine and the use of medicinal herbs, are gaining increasing global relevance and should be actively integrated into contemporary development rather than being confined to museums.

Stressing the importance of sustainability, Lalrinpuii said carbon credits and clean energy should form the cornerstone of the region's future growth strategy. She added that the Northeast is uniquely positioned to emerge as a leader in environmentally sustainable practices while maintaining a balance between development and ecological conservation.

Calling on young people to reshape the narrative around the region, the minister urged the use of the term "land-linked" to reflect the Northeast's evolving connectivity, growing confidence and expanding role in India's overall development trajectory.

## Assam Rifles Seize Rs 39 Crore Yaba Consignment on NH-306 in Cachar



SILCHAR

Assam Rifles, in coordination with the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), intercepted a massive consignment of yaba tablets worth Rs 39 crore on National Highway 306 in Cachar district, dealing a significant blow to an interstate drug trafficking route.

Acting on specific intelligence, security forces conducted a joint operation on November 20, 2025, stopping two Tata trucks suspected of transporting narcotics. The search led to the recovery of 1,30,000 yaba tablets.

Three men, all residents of Tripura, were apprehended during the operation. Officials also seized two mobile phones from the suspects to aid in the ongoing investigation.

Authorities said the consignment was being moved through the Cachar corridor, a strategically sensitive stretch connecting Assam to neighbouring states and the wider Northeast. Investigators are working to trace the source of the drugs and identify potential links to larger trafficking networks.

The Assam Rifles highlighted that the seizure underscores the continued use of Assam's highways by organised narcotics syndicates. The force, which has intensified surveillance and joint operations across the region, described the action as a key step in disrupting supply chains operating through southern Assam.

## ECI announces schedule for Special Short Revision of electoral roll for Dharmanagar By-Election

AGARTALA

The schedule for the special short revision of the electoral roll in connection with the upcoming by-election to the 56-Dharmanagar Assembly Constituency has been officially published, as per the directive of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

According to the schedule, the draft electoral roll will be published on Thursday. Copies of the draft voter list will be made available for public inspection at all designated locations, including every polling station within the 56-Dharmanagar Assembly Constituency, all Tehsil offices, the office of the Electoral Registration Officer (Divisional Magistrate), and the office of the District Election Officer (District Magistrate).

In addition, the draft electoral roll will also be accessible on the official website of the Chief Electoral Officer, Tripura.

The draft electoral roll will be published on January 22 (Thursday). The period for filing claims

and objections will be from January 22 to February 12.

The time period for disposal of claims and objections will be upto Saturday, January 21, and the final electoral roll will be published on January 28.

In connection with the revision process, the Chief Electoral Officer, Tripura, held a meeting with representatives of all recognised political parties on January 17. During the meeting, the CEO briefed the political parties on the revision schedule and appealed for their cooperation to ensure a smooth, transparent process.

The Election Department has appealed to the general public to actively participate in the revision exercise and ensure that the names of all eligible voters are correctly included in the electoral roll for the base year January 1, 2026.

The department emphasised that public cooperation is essential to maintaining an accurate, error-free voter list ahead of the by-election.

## Assam Congress extends ticket application deadline to Jan 28 amid heavy aspirant rush

GUWAHATI

The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Tuesday announced an extension of the last date for submission of party ticket applications for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections to January 28. The decision comes in response to an unprecedented surge of aspirants at the party headquarters in Guwahati.

The extension was approved under the direction of APCC president Gaurav Gogoi, following severe congestion at Rajiv Bhawan, where aspirants and their supporters had formed long queues over the past two days. Party officials said the high turnout made movement within the premises difficult for staff and visitors.

Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia submitted his application on Tuesday, seeking the Congress ticket from Nazira in Sivasagar district. "To counter the BJP's anti-Constitution and anti-Assam policies, the Congress and its allies will contest all 126 Assembly con-



situencies and unite the people," Saikia stated.

According to party sources, around 300 aspirants submitted applications on Monday alone, bringing the total number to over 600 by January 19. Among those

filing nominations were senior leaders and former ministers including Pranati Phukan, sitting MLAs Wazed Ali Choudhury, Pradip Sarkar and Abdul Baten Khandkar, former MLA Rozlina Turkey, and party stalwarts such

**"To counter the BJP's anti-Constitution and anti-Assam policies, the Congress and its allies will contest all 126 Assembly constituencies and unite the people,"**

as Benu Nath, Gopal Sharma, Utpal Gogoi, Deep Bayan, Ajay Gogoi, and Manoranjan Buragohain. Youth leaders Pallavi Saikia, Bidisha Neog, and Palakshi Das also submitted their applications, along with several other aspirants including Ratul Kalita, Ratul Patowary, Luit Kumar Barman, Kridip Barman, Tanzil Hussain, Mohsin Khan, and Jeherul Islam.

APCC officials said the influx of aspirants is expected to continue, with more senior leaders and hundreds of additional aspirants likely to visit Rajiv Bhawan in the coming days, highlighting the intense interest within the party ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections.

## BJP's 'Double-Engine' Rule in Assam Will End with Himanta, Alleges Bhupesh Baghel

GUWAHATI

Senior Congress leader and former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Monday claimed that the BJP's much-touted "double-engine government" in Assam would come to an end with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, accusing him of corruption, cronyism and misuse of power.

Addressing a press conference here, Baghel said the Congress, along with other like-minded opposition parties, is preparing to contest the upcoming Assam Assembly elections in a united manner. He asserted that the fall of the BJP-led government would also mark the end of what he described as widespread corruption and "gundagiri" in the state.

"Himanta Biswa Sarma is responsible for the massive corruption and gundagiri in Assam," Baghel alleged. Citing election affi-

davits filed by the Chief Minister, he claimed that Sarma's assets had grown sharply over the years, from around Rs 17 crore in 2006 to nearly Rs 187 crore by 2021.

Referring to earlier remarks by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Baghel recalled that Sarma had once been described as the "most corrupt chief minister" in the country. He alleged that despite repeated accusations, the Chief Minister continued to enjoy the BJP's protection, which he termed the party's "washing machine," and questioned how Sarma had repeatedly "broken records in corruption" while remaining in power.

Baghel also pointed out that Sarma had previously been associated with the Congress and had served as a minister before joining the BJP in 2015. He said the people of Assam would not tolerate what he

described as abuse of authority and would give a decisive response in the forthcoming elections.

On alliance-building, Baghel said talks were underway with like-minded parties to forge a united opposition front. He added that Congress leaders at the state and district levels were coordinating efforts to strengthen opposition unity ahead of the polls.

At the same press conference, Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi said the party was determined to dislodge the BJP-led government and form a broad-based coalition to challenge the ruling alliance. He claimed there was growing confusion and discontent within the BJP and its allies.

Gogoi alleged that the BJP had earlier balanced leadership between Himanta Biswa Sarma and former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, but said party workers were now

questioning the internal understanding. He also pointed to a lack of clarity over seat-sharing arrangements between the BJP and the Asom Gana Parishad, and referred to tensions involving the Bodoland People's Front and the United People's Party Liberal.

The Congress leaders further alleged that an "authoritarian regime" led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the Centre was being replicated in Assam. They claimed corruption had increased under the current government and said the Congress would expose these issues before the people.

Reiterating the party's "Nava Assam" vision, the Congress said it would continue to mobilise public opinion against the BJP-led government in the run-up to the Assembly elections.

## Mizoram's Chapchar Kut Festival to Commence on Mar 9

AIZAWL

Mizoram's iconic spring festival, Chapchar Kut, one of the state's largest and most vibrant cultural celebrations, will begin on March 9 and continue for a week, officials said on Tuesday.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Spring Festivals Organising Committee chaired by Chief Minister Lalduhoma. The celebrations will formally open with Kut Rur on March 9. As in previous years, the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) will prepare special T-shirts for participants.

A series of cultural and exhibition events have been scheduled as part of the festival. On March 10, exhibitions of handicrafts, handloom textiles and traditional artefacts will be organised, along with a food court featuring Mizo cuisine. A flower show is also slated for the same day.

Painting and photo exhibitions, as well as a film screening, will be held on March 11 at Vanapa Hall and the Information and Public Relations Department's Li-anhhiari Run (Hall) in Aizawl. In addition, a living museum showcasing traditional Mizo life will be set up at Zokhua in Falkawn village, about 15 km from the state capital, on March 11 and 12.

The main Chapchar Kut celebration will be held at Lammual

ground in Aizawl on March 13. Chief Minister Lalduhoma will attend the event as the Kut Pa (father of the festival), while Art and Culture Minister C Lalsawiyunga will serve as the Kut Thlengtu (host of the celebrations).

Officials said a notable change this year is that the traditional bamboo barricade erected at the venue to restrict entry will not be put up. The organising committee has selected "Mizo Code of Ethics: Peace" as the theme of the festival. The Chief Minister's Trophy, carrying a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh along with a citation and memento, will also be presented during the celebrations. Chapchar Kut will be celebrated across Mizoram, marking the completion of the most arduous phase of jhum cultivation, when farmers finish clearing forests and await the sowing season. Historians trace the origins of the festival to nearly 500 years ago in a village called Suhpi in present-day Myanmar.

Although discouraged during the early missionary period in the late 19th century, the festival was revived on a mass scale in 1973 and has since become an integral part of Mizo cultural identity.

Officials said Chapchar Kut continues to draw visitors from across India and abroad, reinforcing its importance as a major cultural and tourism event in the state.

## United Opposition alliance inevitable in Assam, says APCC chief Gaurav Gogoi



GUWAHATI

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC)

Quest!

**Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear**

**"Corruption of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is the major issue for this election. Earlier, the BJP had also levelled corruption charges against him but later denied them after he joined the party".**

(AICC) - Bhupesh Baghel and Bandhu Tirkey - and other party leaders, said deliberations on the alliance are ongoing at various levels. "It is conclusive that we will form the alliance, and no factor can deter us from this path," he stated.

Gogoi alleged widespread corruption under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and said that voters in Assam are seeking a change in government. He pointed to a growing rift between Sarma and former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, alleging that Sarma has been attempting to eliminate Sonowal from Assam's political landscape. "Now, one must criticize Sarbananda Sonowal to get close to Himanta Biswa Sarma," Gogoi claimed.

Raising concerns over electoral integrity, Gogoi also alleged that names of

voters were being removed from the electoral rolls under instructions from the ruling party and urged the Election Commission of India to provide adequate opportunity for scrutiny and claims.

Speaking at the event, senior Congress leader and former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel accused Chief Minister Sarma of unprecedented corruption, which he said would mark the end of the BJP's "double-engine government" in Assam and at the Centre. "Corruption of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is the major issue for this election. Earlier, the BJP had also levelled corruption charges against him but later denied them after he joined the party," Baghel said. He added that Congress leaders Debabrata Saikia and Gaurav Gogoi will spearhead the party's campaign, with the official election agenda to be announced soon. Bandhu Tirkey emphasised public frustration over what he termed the "culture of corruption" under the current state government, asserting that the people of Assam would not give the BJP a second chance. "In the election campaign, we will highlight the misdeeds of Himanta Biswa Sarma before the voters," Tirkey said.

The Congress leadership's statements underline its strategy to forge a broad-based opposition alliance while focusing on governance and corruption issues as central themes for the 2026 Assembly elections.

**North East Integration Rally Reception**

20<sup>th</sup> January 2026

AT

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## India will be hub of green hydrogen, our target is 5 million metric tons per annum by 2030: Pralhad Joshi

DAVOS

Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi has said that India's agenda at Davos is that transition is not a burden for growth, it is an engine for growth and noted how the renewable movement, started by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is bringing down the cost of electricity in India.

In an interview the Minister also said India will be the hub of green hydrogen and that people want to study the Indian model of energy production.

"India's agenda at Davos is that transition is not a burden for growth, it is an engine for growth. And because of that, the cost of renewable energy has come down in India. Because of this renewable movement, which the Prime Minister started almost from 2015-16 and very aggressively from almost 2019, it is bringing down the entire cost of electricity in India. Now, Andhra Pradesh has said we are going to reduce the cost of electricity," he said.

"Devendra Fadnavis, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, has announced that the tariff will come down... Now we're pitching for battery storage, pump storage, grid stability, green energy corridor, all these things put together in coming days, India can showcase itself that we are producing green energy, transition is also happening, growth is also taking place. Our growth is good, and our renewable energy is also growing well," he added.

Referring to Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, passed by Parliament during the Winter Session, Joshi said the issues concerning private sector have been

addressed.

"Nuclear bill, of course, it has already come into force. It has been notified... Whatever issues there are, as far as the private investors are concerned, all those have been addressed in a new bill which has been passed under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Further about green hydrogen, we are going as per our target," he said.

"For green ammonia, the world's lowest price has been discovered in India for the first time. I'm quite confident that, day by day, the prices of renewable energy have come down. In the same way, the green hydrogen price will also come down. India will be the hub. Our target is 5 million metric tons by 2030. There are many agreements happening... People want to study the Indian model," he added.

The Minister earlier talked about India's growth story and efforts towards resilient infrastructure.

"Today, everyone here wants to visit India's pavilion because it stands as the world's most attractive destination for investment... We are seeing a healthy competition among states for investment... When state infrastructure improves, the nation benefits... Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, we have moved from reform, perform, and transform to now adding 'inform'... From being fragile to becoming the world's fourth-largest economy, India has made tremendous strides... India witnessed growth in renewable energy: solar capacity, which was once less than 3 gigawatts, now stands at 137 gigawatts," Joshi said.

"We are now planning for resilient infrastructure to absorb the shocks of renewable energy, ensuring proper forecasting, and managing the

transition and transformation issues India is actively addressing today... India's growth story is taking shape, but to truly showcase this, we need more than \$350 billion for green energy and resilient infrastructure alone... Our non-performing assets (NPAs), which once were the highest in the world, now stand at a historic low of 2.1%. This reflects India's careful and effective management across all sectors," he added.

In his keynote remarks at the session 'Call to Action: Spotlight on the Global Mission on AI for Energy', the Minister highlighted how India has built 266.78 GW of Renewable Energy capacity through clear policies.

He shared India's journey in the energy transition and what it can offer the world—especially the Global South.

"Highlighted how India has built 266.78 GW of #RenewableEnergy capacity through clear policies, strong institutions, grid expansion and a robust domestic ecosystem, making this transition scalable and replicable for other countries. Underlined how AI can improve forecasting, reduce losses, lower costs and strengthen grid reliability and shared India's shift from pilots to platform-based deployment through Digital Public Infrastructure for Energy. Reaffirmed India's commitment to advancing the Global Mission on AI for Energy with partners, including the @isolaralliance, to enable an open, inclusive and scalable," he said in a post on X.

The minister also presented Country Strategy Dialogue on India at the Congress Centre at World Economic Forum in Davos, outlining India's clean energy transition as a driver of growth, competitiveness and social transformation under the leadership of PM Modi.

## Economic power alone cannot...robust military required: IAF Chief Marshal

### AP SINGH ON ENSURING NATIONAL SECURITY AMID VENEZUELA CRISIS

NEW DELHI

Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh on Wednesday underscored the importance of military power as essential for national security, arguing that economic strength alone is insufficient to protect a nation's sovereignty.

Addressing the 22nd Subroto Mukherjee Seminar in Dlehi, organised by the Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies (CAPSS), the Air Chief stressed that economic strength alone cannot ensure national security, citing examples of Venezuela and Iraq.

He noted that even if a country is economically strong, it can't ensure security without a robust military. Singh pointed to India's history, where, despite controlling 60% of the world's GDP alongside China, it was colonised because of its lack of military strength.

"We must understand that military power stands as the ultimate arbiter of national power. Anybody can be economically sound but can't be secure. We have the example of our own country, we plus China controlled 60% of world's GDP at one time, but that didn't stop us from getting captured and colonised. Any one of these powers is very important, but finally, what is required is a robust military, because if you don't have it, you can be subjugated by anybody. Venezuela and Iraq are the most recent examples. It is the military power which is important, but what is more important is the will to use that military power," he said.

Relations are highly strained following a significant US military operation on January 3, 2026, in which US forces captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, who now faces narco-terrorism charges in a New York federal court.

The US invasion of Iraq, known

as Operation Iraqi Freedom, began in March 2003 with a U.S.-led coalition, citing false claims of Iraq possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and ties to al-Qaeda, toppling Saddam Hussein's regime.

Air Chief Marshal Singh highlighted the need for a robust military and the will to use it, quoting Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's couplet on forgiveness and strength.

"Unless you have that will, you can keep showing restraint, but that restraint will be seen as a weakness. It is only when you're strong enough, and you show restraint, that it is seen as a capability, stating, 'kshama shobhate us bhujang ko, jisake paas garal ho usako kya jo dantaheen, visharait, vineet, saral ho.'" (Forgiveness befits that serpent which possesses venom; What good is it to one who is toothless, venomless, humble, and simple?)

Air Chief Marshal Singh added that India's security requirements are often shaped by developments in its neighbourhood, forcing reactive decision-making at times. He stressed the need for faster decisions on Make in India initiatives and strategic partnerships for next-generation engines and weapon systems to strengthen self-reliance.

He also praised the founding father of the Indian Air Force, Subroto Mukherjee, for building the force with foresight despite limited resources. Singh stated that Mukherjee set the IAF on the right path, and it has been growing from strength to strength. He also highlighted that he is in a better position than his predecessors due to improved resources.

"Subroto Mukherjee built the Indian Air Force in an era of constraints, uncertainties, and limited resources... With the kind of foresight he had, he took us on the right path, because as they say, well begun is half done. He put us



on the right path, and we have been growing from strength to strength. I think I am in a much better place than my predecessors because resources continue to get better and better," Air Chief Marshal Singh said.

Congratulating CAPSS for organising the seminar, the Air Chief said such platforms keep the armed forces intellectually prepared in an increasingly chaotic global environment. Recalling that the IAF completed 100 years last year, he asserted that building a strong Air Force remains a necessity to safeguard India's sovereignty.

Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee is widely regarded

as the Father of the Indian Air Force, a pioneer who became its first Indian Chief of the Air Staff (COAS) in independent India, leading the IAF's transformation from a British-dominated force to a self-reliant air service through his vision and leadership.

He was one of the first six Indians selected for training at the RAF College in Cranwell, UK. In 1932, he earned his commission and became a founding pilot of the IAF's first squadron. As the first Indian COAS from 1954 to 1960, he was instrumental in building and modernising the IAF, fostering self-reliance and operational excellence.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Trump says Iran would be 'wiped off the earth' over assassination plot



WASHINGTON:

President Donald Trump on Tuesday reiterated a warning that Iran would be wiped "off the face of this earth" if Tehran ever succeeded in assassinating the US leader.

In a heated exchange of threats, Iran and the United States both threatened broadscale wars if the leaders of either country are assassinated.

"I have very firm instructions. Anything happens, they're going to wipe them off the face of this earth," Trump said in a News Nation interview that aired Tuesday, in response to a question on Iran's threats on the 79-year-old's life.

Earlier Tuesday, in response



**"I have very firm instructions. Anything happens, they're going to wipe them off the face of this earth," Trump said that aired Tuesday, in response to a question on Iran's threats on the 79-year-old's life**

to any threats facing Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iranian General Abolfazl Shekarchi was quoted as saying Trump already knew Tehran would not hold back if the tables were turned.

"Trump knows that if a hand of aggression is extended toward

our leader, we will not only sever that hand, and this is not a mere slogan," Shekarchi was quoted as telling Iranian state media.

"But we will set their world on fire and leave them no safe haven in the region."

Trump issued a similar warn-

ing to Iran a year ago, shortly after returning to the White House, when he told reporters "if they do it, they get obliterated."

Iran is still reeling from violence unleashed during some of the biggest anti-government protests since the Islamic revolution in 1979. Human rights groups are working to confirm the number of people killed during the protests, with the Human Rights Activists News Agency reporting more than 4,000 confirmed deaths.

The Norway-based Iran Human Rights NGO has said verification of deaths in the crackdown remains severely hampered due to the communication restrictions, but noted on Monday that available information "indicates that the number of protesters killed may exceed even the highest media estimates", which reach 20,000.

Iranians began holding mass demonstrations to call for relief from economic woes in December, when the country's currency hit a new low under the leadership of the 86-year-old ayatollah, who has resisted democratic reform for decades. Many in Iran's global diaspora, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi,

have called for US intervention against the ruling apparatus in Tehran.

Ebadi urged "highly targeted actions" against Iran's supreme leader and commanders of his Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

## Sunita Williams calls India 'home', highlights race to build a sustainable human presence on the Moon



WASHINGTON

Astronaut Sunita Williams on Tuesday said that coming to India always feels like returning home, recalling her deep personal connection to the country through her family roots. Speaking at an interaction held at the American Centre in New Delhi, Williams noted that her father was born in India, a bond that, she said, makes every visit to the country especially meaningful. Addressing a packed audience during the one-and-a-half-hour session, the veteran astronaut spoke at length about her journey in space exploration, her experiences aboard the International Space Station, and the future direction of human spaceflight. She reflected on how international cooperation has been central to the success of space missions so far, even as the sector enters a new phase marked by growing competition and technological ambition, according to media reports Wednesday.

Williams said that competition in the global space sector is already well under way, driven by both national space agencies and private

players. She described this phase as a natural evolution of space exploration, noting that innovation often accelerates when multiple actors pursue similar goals. Despite the competitive environment, she stressed the importance of collaboration, particularly for complex and long-duration missions beyond low Earth orbit. A key focus of her remarks was humanity's renewed push toward the Moon. Williams said the long-term objective is not merely to send astronauts to the lunar surface but to do so in a sustainable manner. Establishing systems that allow humans to live and work on the Moon for extended periods, she explained, will be critical for future exploration, including eventual missions to Mars. She underlined that sustainability, safety and scientific value are now central considerations in mission planning. During the interaction, Williams shared personal insights from her time aboard the International Space Station, describing daily life in microgravity, the physical and mental challenges of long-duration missions, and the sense of

perspective that comes from viewing Earth from space. She spoke about conducting scientific experiments, maintaining the station, and working with crewmates from different countries, highlighting how teamwork and preparation are essential in the extreme environment of space. She also reflected on the inspiration space exploration can provide to younger generations, particularly students interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Williams encouraged young people to remain curious and persistent, emphasizing that careers in space are built over time through learning, discipline and resilience. The interaction concluded with questions from the audience, ranging from future lunar missions to life aboard the space station and the evolving role of private companies in space exploration. Williams' remarks underscored both the rapid changes underway in the global space landscape and the enduring human drive to explore beyond Earth, a journey she said is increasingly defined by ambition, cooperation and a vision of sustainable presence beyond our planet.

## North East Integration Rally to Reach Silchar on January 22, Cultural Events Planned

**North East Integration Rally 2026**  
Peace | Progress | Prosperity

**INVITATION**

You are cordially invited to the Barak Festival & NEIR Fest of the North East Integration Rally 2026 – an initiative celebrating unity, culture, and the vibrant spirit of Northeast India.

**DATE** 📅 January 22, 2026

**TIME** 🕒 4:00 PM-6:30 PM

**VENUE** 📍 Gandhi Bhawan, Silchar, Assam, India

RSVP KRC Foundation: +91-8721838313

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**North East Integration Rally 2026**  
Peace | Progress | Prosperity

**INVITATION**

You are cordially invited to the Barak Festival & NEIR Fest of the North East Integration Rally 2026 – an initiative celebrating unity, culture, and the vibrant spirit of Northeast India.

**DATE** 📅 January 22, 2026

**TIME** 🕒 5:00 PM-7:00 PM

**VENUE** 📍 Saraswati Vidya Niketan, Bankha Dutta Road, Sribhumi, Assam, India

RSVP KRC Foundation: +91-8721838313  
+91-7002678843

www.northeastintegrationrally.in

**OUR CORRESPONDENT**

**SILCHAR**

The Barak Festival and NEIR Fest (North East Integration Rally) will be held across

culture, and the living spirit of Northeast India.

The programme is being organised by the KRC Foundation in collaboration with local institutions. It brings

be held from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm at Saraswati Vidya Niketan on Bankha Dutta Road in Sribhumi district.

The final programme of the Barak Festival and NEIR Fest will be held on January 23 at S.S. College, Hailakandi. The event will run from 12:00 noon to 1:30 pm and is being organised in collaboration with the college.

The North East Integration Rally 2026 is a major

initiative focused on peace, cultural exchange, and people-to-people connection across the Northeast.

The Barak Festival and NEIR Fest are important parts of this journey, highlighting local traditions, shared values, and regional harmony.

For more information, interested persons can contact the KRC Foundation at 8721838313 or 9401929722.



three locations in Barak Valley on January 22 and 23. The events aim to celebrate unity,

together students, artists, and citizens to share culture and build bonds across the region.

The first event will take place on January 22 at Gandhi Bhawan, Silchar, from 4:00 pm to 6:30 pm. On the same day, another programme will



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We are looking for volunteers across NE & West Bengal Interested candidates (College students, youths) can register at https://northeastintegrationrally.in/Volunteer\_Registration.aspx, send an email: neintegrationrally@gmail.com

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## NEIR 2026 CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME REINFORCES IDEA OF A UNITED NORTHEAST IN MANIPUR



### OUR CORRESPONDENT

#### IMPHAL

Imphal witnessed a strong message of unity and shared identity on Tuesday afternoon as the North East Integration Rally (NEIR) 2026 hosted a vibrant cultural exchange programme at GM Hall. The programme was jointly organised by Atinga and the North East Zone Cultural Centre, drawing participants and guests from across the region. The event was part of the larger North East Integration Rally that began its journey from Kolkata on January 4 and will continue till February. Moving through different states of the North East, the rally aims to bring people closer through culture, conversation, and direct interaction. Rather than focusing on distance or destinations, NEIR places emphasis on connection, understanding, and mutual respect.

The Imphal programme saw the

presence of Manipur MLA Thangjam Arunkumar, cultural figure Dr Dabli Thangjam, and Meghalaya MLA AL Hek. Their participation reflected the growing inter-state cooperation and collective commitment towards strengthening regional harmony.

Addressing the gathering, Biswadeep Gupta, Founder of NEIR and Trustee of the KRC Foundation, spoke about the deeper vision behind the rally. He said that the North East Integration Rally was conceived to nurture unity among the eight states of the region by celebrating diversity instead of fearing it. According to him, NEIR is not just an event but a platform where communities can meet, share their stories, traditions, and lived experiences. Gupta stressed that cultural exchange plays a vital role in breaking long-held misconceptions. When people witness each other's art, music, food, and traditions, emotional barriers begin to fall.

He added that peace, development, and national integration can only grow when people feel connected at a human level. Konthoujam Bobin, Secretary of Atinga, said that Atinga is proud to be one of the organisers of NEIR 2026. He noted that the rally is designed to bring together the many ethnic and cultural groups of the North East under a shared vision. He described NEIR as an effort to turn diversity into collective strength and to ensure that every community feels seen and heard.

One of the most moving aspects of the programme was the participation of Internally Displaced Persons. Cultural performances by IDPs reflected resilience, hope, and the power of expression even in times of hardship. Their presence reminded the audience that integration also means inclusion and empathy.

Stalls set up by residents of Laishoi Relief Camp and Sawgbung Relief

Camp added another meaningful layer to the event. Through handicrafts, local products, and interaction, the stalls offered visitors a glimpse into the lives, skills, and creativity of displaced communities. These spaces became points of dialogue, not just displays. The cultural performances showcased the shared heritage of the North East while highlighting the unique identity of each community. Music, dance, and traditional expressions flowed seamlessly, reinforcing the message that unity does not erase difference. Instead, it allows differences to stand side by side with dignity. The Imphal programme under NEIR 2026 stood as a reminder that integration is built through small, sincere steps. Through culture, conversation, and collaboration, the rally continues its journey across the region, carrying with it a simple but powerful idea. The North East grows stronger when its people grow closer.



## 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: MOUs, and Dignitaries can register for the conclave. Registration fee is not required, and presentation is required. Participation is through invitation only. Different awards are provided.

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



**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.



**11 JAN**  
**5E For Success Conclave**  
 The 4th Annual 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: Seminar, Public Speaking (College). In the online event, former students of NE India Schools and Colleges can participate.

**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 for journalists, publishers, bloggers, and content creators, sponsors, guides, speakers, members.



**11 JAN**  
**film festival**  
 Award-Giving (Best movie) Film from Manipur. Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W. Media Talk, Exhibitions, Meet & Greet.



**BROADCAST PARTNER**



**REGISTER HERE**

Contact: [info@krcfoundation.org](mailto:info@krcfoundation.org)  
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**PAINTING CARNIVAL**  
**NE CULTURAL FEST**  
**E-SPORTS**

**FILM FESTIVAL | EXHIBITION**  
 BOOK CLUB | SEMINAR | WORKSHOP



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 WP: 0721300019

**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.**

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



**10-12 JAN**  
**Book Bank**  
 #NoOneLeftBehind Campaign | Book Bank | Donate | Buy | Sell

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

**Painting Carnival**  
 Water Colour and Oil and Saw Paper Campaign

**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".



**11 JAN**  
**film festival**  
 Award-Giving (Best movie) Film from Manipur. Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W. Media Talk, Exhibitions, Meet & Greet.



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



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