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PERSPECTIVE
Being hated by idiots is the price you pay for not being one of them.

Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata Bus Service Set to Resume

AGARTALA

The cross-border bus service connecting Agartala, Dhaka and Kolkata is poised to resume regular operations after remaining suspended for over a year, with trial runs commencing on Saturday.

A bus under the Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata route departed from the Krishnanagar depot in Agartala for Dhaka as part of the initial trial phase. Officials said the test operations would continue for the next two to three days before a final schedule is announced.

Manoranjan Debnath, Manager of the International Bus Service Operator, said that once the system stabilises, the service will run thrice a week. He clarified that no fresh permissions are required to resume operations, as the intergovernmental agreement between India and Bangladesh remains in force.

"We halted the bus service due to a sharp decline in passenger numbers and visa-related issues. The footfall had fallen to an all-time low. With the situation improving in Bangladesh, we are planning to resume regular services from next week," Debnath said.

The Royal-Maitri international bus service had been suspended amid political unrest in Bangladesh, leading to disruptions in cross-border travel and trade.

Tripura Road Transport Corporation (TRTC) Vice-Chairman Samar Roy said the schedule for regular operations would be finalised and announced on February 23 after reviewing the outcome of the trial runs.

Welcoming the development, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha expressed optimism that the restoration of connectivity would help ease recent strains in bilateral ties and boost economic engagement.

WHO SAID WHAT

We are ruled by Bureaucracy not Democracy ~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur

Mystique Mayong Eco Tourism Resort Wins Best Resort of the Year 2025

BISWADEEP GUPTA

MAYONG: Mystique Mayong Eco Tourism Resort, a 3 star eco luxury stay near Mayong-Pobitora, has received the Best Resort of the Year 2025 award from the Assam Hospitality Welfare Association.

The resort opened in September 2023. In a short time, it has become a popular travel spot in Assam. It lies about 40 km from Guwahati and around 15 km from Jagiroad.

The property stands close to the famous Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, known for one of the highest numbers of the rare one horned rhinoceros in the world.

Mayong itself is known for its deep history, old traditions, healing practices, and even stories of river dolphins. The area sits between the mighty Brahmaputra River and the Kolong river, giving it a rich eco and cultural setting. Since it began, the resort has focused on green tourism. It



works with local people and offers wildlife tours, cultural visits, and event hosting for both leisure and corporate guests. The award shows its steady work in service quality and eco tourism. The management thanked guests, partners, and the local community for their support. They said the honour will push them to raise standards further and help place Mayong-Pobitora on the global eco tourism map.

Khemchand Calls on Amit Shah, Peace Roadmap and Cabinet Expansion in Focus

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Sunday, with discussions centring on peace-building measures, rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and the impending expansion of the state Cabinet. The meeting, held at Shah's residence in the national capital, marked the first formal interaction between the two leaders since Khemchand assumed office as Chief Minister on February 4, 2026. Khemchand was accompanied by his two Deputy Chief Ministers - Losli Dikho of the Naga People's Front (NPF) and Nemcha Kipgen of the BJP. Kipgen, who represents Kangpokpi district, is the first woman to hold the post of Deputy Chief Minister in Manipur.



In a post on X following the meeting, Khemchand described the discussions as "detailed and constructive," touching upon key issues concerning peace, stability, rehabilitation and development in the state.

He stated that the Union Home Minister assured full support from the Centre for the early resettlement and rehabilitation of IDPs displaced during the ethnic unrest that

has gripped Manipur over the past months. "Had the privilege to call on Hon'ble Union Home Minister Shri @AmitShah Ji today in New Delhi, accompanied by Hon'ble Deputy Chief Ministers Smt. @KipgenNemcha and Shri L. Dikho. We had a detailed and constructive discussion on key issues concerning Manipur, including measures for peace, stability, rehabilitation, and progress," the Chief Minister wrote.

He further conveyed gratitude on behalf

of the people of Manipur for what he termed the Centre's "continued support, guidance, and commitment" towards the welfare of the state.

Sources indicated that Shah also sought an update on the steps taken by the newly formed BJP-led coalition government to bridge divides between communities and restore public confidence.

Since taking charge earlier this month, the Khemchand government has initiated

outreach efforts aimed at fostering dialogue and promoting reconciliation across ethnic lines. Officials said the Centre is closely monitoring the state's peace-building initiatives and has expressed satisfaction with the direction of the new administration.

Apart from the security and rehabilitation agenda, the issue of Cabinet expansion featured prominently in the meeting.

According to sources close to the Chief Minister, the Union Home Minister has given his approval for expanding the Council of Ministers. The exercise is likely to take place within the next two to three days after Khemchand returns to Imphal. The Chief Minister is expected back in the state capital within two days. Khemchand was sworn in on February 4 along with two Deputy Chief Ministers and two Cabinet Ministers. Under constitutional provisions, Manipur, which has a 60-member Legislative Assembly, can have a Council of Ministers comprising up to 12 members, including the Chief Minister.

At present, seven ministerial positions remain vacant. Additionally, portfolios have not yet been allocated to those who took oath more than two weeks ago, adding urgency to the Cabinet expansion exercise. Political observers say the allocation of portfolios and

induction of additional ministers will be crucial in balancing regional and community representation within the coalition government, particularly at a time when restoring stability remains the administration's top priority. The meeting is being viewed as a significant step in strengthening coordination between the Centre and the new state leadership. With Manipur continuing to grapple with the aftermath of prolonged unrest, both governments appear keen to project a unified approach to rehabilitation, governance and long-term reconciliation. While no formal statement was issued by the Union Home Ministry after the meeting, the signals emerging from the Chief Minister's camp suggest that New Delhi is prepared to extend logistical, financial and administrative support to ensure that the resettlement of displaced families and restoration of normalcy proceed without delay.

The coming days are expected to witness key political developments in Imphal, as the Cabinet expansion takes shape and the new government seeks to consolidate its administrative framework amid ongoing peace efforts.

Over 36,700 Students, Including 392 IDPs, to Appear for Manipur HSLC Exams



IMPHAL

A total of 36,725 students, including 392 internally displaced persons (IDPs), will appear for the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examinations conducted by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur from February 23 to March 23, 2026.

The examinations will be held across 161 centres spread over the hill and valley districts of the state, with authorities putting in place extensive security and monitoring measures to ensure smooth conduct.

Of the total candidates, 18,375 are boys and 18,350 are girls, reflecting a near-equal gender distribution.

BOSEM Secretary S. Jitela Sharma said 8,191 students are from government schools, 1,498 from government-aided institutions, and 27,036 from private schools.

Among the 392 displaced candidates appearing for the exams, 231 are from valley districts while 161 are from the hill districts.

Out of the 36,725 candidates, 19,046 students will write the examinations at 61 centres located in the hill districts. The remaining 17,679 candidates will appear at 100 centres across the valley districts.

Officials said the distribution of centres was planned to ensure accessibility and security, particularly for displaced students affected by the prolonged ethnic unrest in the state.

To maintain law and order, Section

163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita has been promulgated in and around examination centres.

The provision restricts unauthorised gatherings and aims to prevent any untoward incidents during the examination period.

The Board has appointed 10 nodal officers to oversee the conduct of the examinations. Additionally, two inspection teams comprising 36 members each have been constituted to supervise centres in the hill and valley districts. Twelve special monitoring teams have also been formed to ensure strict adherence to guidelines.

Sharma warned that any candidate or individual found using unfair means would face stringent action under the The Manipur Prevention of Malpractices in High School Leaving Certificate and Higher Secondary Examinations Act, 2024. The Act provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of up to Rs 1 crore for violations.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh extended his best wishes to students appearing for the Class X board examinations.

In a message, the Chief Minister described the board exams as an important milestone in a student's academic journey but urged candidates to remain calm and confident.

He encouraged them to trust their preparation and focus on sincere effort rather than results.

"Examinations do not define an individual's worth or future potential," he said, advising students to approach the tests with composure and determination.

With security arrangements tightened and monitoring mechanisms in place, authorities expressed confidence that the month-long examination process would proceed smoothly across the state.

Manipur Declares Three-Day State Mourning for MLA Vungzagin Valte

IMPHAL

The Manipur government has announced a three-day state mourning from Sunday following the demise of BJP legislator Vungzagin Valte, who passed away on Saturday after prolonged medical treatment.

An official notification stated that during the mourning period, the National Flag will be flown at half-mast on all government buildings across the state. No official entertainment programmes will be held as a mark of respect to the departed leader.

Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh reached New Delhi late Saturday evening and proceeded to Medanta Hospital in Gurugram to pay his last respects. The Chief Minister stood in silence before the mortal remains, offered floral tributes, and conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family.

A prayer service was organised in the national capital in the presence of MLAs and members of the Zomi community based in Delhi. Valte, 61, was a Zomi tribal legislator representing the Thanlon Assembly constituency. He had sustained serious injuries in a mob attack in Imphal's Nagamapal area when ethnic violence erupted in May 2023. Following the incident, he was shifted to Delhi for advanced medical treatment and remained under care for nearly two years.

In April last year, he returned to his residence in Churachandpur along with his wife after undergoing extensive treatment. However, his health deteriorated suddenly on February 7. Taking personal charge of the situation, the Chief Minister arranged for an ambulance to evacuate the ailing legislator for specialised medical care.

Valte began his political career with the Congress and was first elected to the Manipur Legislative Assembly in 2012 from Thanlon. He later joined the BJP and was re-elected in 2017, serving as Minister for General Administration and Transport in the state government. He retained the seat again in the 2022 Assembly elections.

'Boong' scripts history with BAFTA win for Best Children & Family Film



IMPHAL/LONDON

In a landmark moment for regional Indian cinema, Boong, a Manipuri-language debut feature, has become the first Indian film to win the BAFTA for Best Children & Family Film, marking a watershed achievement at the 2026 ceremony held at the Royal Festival Hall in London.

The film's triumph at the 2026 edition of the BAFTA Awards not only placed Manipur on the global cinematic map but also underscored the growing international recognition of stories emerging from India's Northeast - a region long underrepresented in mainstream Indian filmmaking.

Boong was the only Indian entry in its category and prevailed over major international productions including Zootopia 2, Lilo & Stitch and Arco, making its win all the more significant.

Directed by Lakshmi Priya Devi, Boong tells the poignant story of a young boy from Manipur who sets out on a deeply personal quest - to reunite his estranged family as the ultimate gift for his mother. In the child's innocent imagination, bringing his missing father home would be the most precious present of all. What begins as a simple, heartfelt mission gradually unfolds into a transformative journey, altering the course of

his life and leading to unexpected change.

The film's emotional depth, rooted in everyday realities of life in Manipur, resonated strongly with international audiences and juries alike. Its intimate storytelling and regional authenticity stood out amid high-budget studio contenders. Producer Farhan Akhtar, who took to the stage alongside Lakshmi Priya Devi and fellow producers Ritesh Sidhwani, Alan McAlex and others to receive the award, spoke about his long association with the director and what drew him to the project. "Lakshmi Priya and I have known each other for about 20 years," Akhtar said during his remarks. "This film is set in a region of India from which we rarely get to watch films. It was nice to support that, and it's a very heartwarming story. So, it just felt right." The film is also backed by producers Vikesh Bhutani and Shujaat Saudagar, reflecting a collaborative effort to bring a distinct Northeastern voice to global audiences. From festival discovery to global acclaim.

Before its BAFTA success, Boong had already built an impressive festival run. The film premiered in the Discovery section of the Toronto International Film Festival in 2024, a platform known for spotlighting emerging filmmakers.

It subsequently travelled to the Warsaw Film Festival 2024, MAMI Mumbai Film Festival 2024, the International Film Festival of India and the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne 2025, steadily building international momentum.



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AI IN DEFENCE

Warfare is changing. It will no longer be restricted to conventional or kinetic but will be hybrid and multi-domain. Wars may also no longer be short and intense but prolonged while remaining below the nuclear threshold. Today's warfare will involve large scale employment of drones, cyberattacks, space and informational warfare, guided by AI. Hybrid warfare or Grey Zone warfare will always be ongoing.

Intelligence inputs to commanders would flow from multiple sources requiring immediate decisions. AI based tools could be the backbone of systems assessing data and assisting in decision making. Economic dependency and capital restrictions will be exploited to force nations to toe lines of the powerful. These will also be the means to contain strategic autonomy.

The four-year old Russo-Ukraine war has seen an increased role of AI in the battlefield. Ukraine has incorporated AI in drone warfare; intelligence assessments as also exploited it to collaborate with western technology companies on innovative solutions. Russia primarily uses AI in UAVs.

Both nations are currently using AI empowered drones which are preprogrammed to detect and engage targets and since they do not emanate signals, cannot be jammed while being small, difficult to engage. India has learnt its lessons from this conflict as also from Operation Sindoor and are now incorporating them.

The CDS recently stated, 'For a long time, military strategy depended on geography and terrain. Now we are in an era where geography is becoming slightly less relevant, and technology is driving instability,' adding, 'New-domain warfare is smarter, faster, and results can be achieved simultaneously.' Operation Sindoor was an example where all domains of warfare including cyber and space were employed simultaneously and successfully.

AI is today a key driver in the ongoing technological revolution in every domain of life, defence included. It possesses the potential to redefine strategy, operations and decision making. AI has both, military and civil uses, hence needs a collaborative effort in development. Civil-military fusion is the best option to enhance its potential.

With the armed forces being a major exploiter, they can ideally be a test bed for AI based systems. However, there is a difference. AI systems in defence must be reliable, secure and robust, considering conditions in which they would be employed as also lives of soldiers are at stake. Once tested by the armed forces, these can be sourced for other fields.

For the armed forces, AI is an operational necessity and a force multiplier. In combat scenarios AI systems can process data flowing from multiple sources including drones, satellites and ground sensors, evaluate threats as also deliver real time solutions, doing so at speeds far faster than humans. It also plays a role in the information domain, sifting misinformation and disinformation, which are exploited by the adversary to add to confusion as also mislead the public.

It can also assist in air defence, electronic warfare, logistics, equipment maintenance, training and cyber security, reducing human workload and errors. It is also being employed in predictive maintenance. AI also enables forces to react faster while making effective use of available resources. AI also has a role in cyber defence and electronic warfare, detecting attempted intrusions and taking countermeasures.

No matter how effective an AI based system is, human decision makers should always have the final say. As Lt Gen Vipul Singhal, the army's deputy chief, speaking at the AI summit, mentioned, 'AI can inform decisions, but only humans can exercise judgment and bear responsibility for them.' He added that AI places burdens on leadership, command responsibility and strategic stability.

On the induction of AI into the Indian armed forces, Singhal added, 'we as the Indian armed forces and the Indian Army are fully cognisant of the transformative power of AI to increase our operational efficiency and we are making every effort in that direction to ensure that AI is incorporated into our decision support systems, into our surveillance, reconnaissance and all the other functions that we perform.' What he mentioned as essential is subjecting AI enabled systems to strict evaluation and trials before induction, similar to other equipment.

The armed forces have initiated multiple AI based projects, some of which like the AI-based Intrusion Detection System and the naval Maritime Information Management and Analysis Centre have already been implemented. Many more are in the pipeline. Dr Chandrika Kaushik from DRDO mentioned, 'From advanced surveillance platforms to systems that can improve their own performance over time, AI use cases are expanding rapidly within the armed forces.'

Exploitation of AI is natural, however as autonomous weapon systems, operating without human intervention gain ground, there will always be chances of errors. Development of such weapons should be regulated and human decision making incorporated.

Israel's use of the Lavender system coupled with others like 'Where's Daddy' and 'the Gospel' during its conflict with Hamas resulted in identification of 37,000 Hamas operatives, including low level operatives, recommended to be targeted. Many were eliminated alongside collateral damage and civilian casualties. This is being used as an example seeking restricted use of AI in war.

There is also a push for a 'Glass box' model where logic and decision paths can be inspected and over-ridden, unlike opaque black-box models. In a Glass Box model commanders stay above the system and have visibility and are final decision makers.

Since national security is involved, India needs AI that is developed and hosted within, not only for defence but also governance and critical sectors. As Rajiv Chetwani, Director of Information Systems, ISRO mentioned, 'sovereign AI is a strategic necessity and a critical infrastructure for space observation and national autonomy.'

This implies systems which are designed, developed and controlled within the nation. This will ensure that these systems are protected from hidden backdoors and foreign interference and the nation cannot be blackmailed at critical junctures. AI is the future but at the same time human decision making should have the final say.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The mind is everything. What you think you become." - Buddha

Can Tarique Rahman's BNP Government in Bangladesh Reset Ties with India?



Bangladesh has entered a new political chapter with the swearing-in of a government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) after a largely peaceful and competitive national election held on February 12, 2026. With the transition of power in Dhaka, attention has swiftly shifted eastward to India's northeastern states, which encircle Bangladesh on almost all sides except for a narrow strip touching Myanmar and the Bay of Bengal.

For millions in Assam and the wider Northeast, the formation of a BNP-led administration under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is not merely a domestic political development in a neighboring country. It carries direct implications for border management, internal security, demographic anxieties, and regional connectivity. The question being asked quietly in policymaking circles and more openly in border districts is: can Dhaka under the BNP move toward a pragmatic and friendly relationship with India?

A New Mandate in Dhaka
The February election, widely described as festive and comparatively credible, recorded a turnout of nearly 60 percent. The BNP secured a commanding 212 seats in the 300-member Jatiya Sangsad, with 50 additional seats reserved for women members. The victory marked a decisive return to power for the party founded by former President Ziaur Rahman and long led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Sixty-year-old Tarique Rahman, son of Khaleda Zia and Ziaur Rahman, steered the party's campaign without falling back on strident anti-India rhetoric—a tactic historically deployed in Bangladeshi electoral politics to mobilize nationalist sentiment. His restrained tone continued after taking oath at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in Dhaka on February 17. Rather than amplifying grievances, Rahman signaled a "holistic" approach to relations with neighbors, including India.

That tone has been noted carefully in New Delhi.

Political tremors in Dhaka are felt in India's Northeast. Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and parts of West Bengal share long, porous borders with the country. These states have lived with two persistent concerns for decades: irregular migration and cross-border security challenges.

Assam in particular has endured a protracted debate over demographic change, culminating in the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The influx of migrants—real or perceived—remains a deeply sensitive issue tied to identity, land rights, and electoral politics.

Security anxieties have also surfaced periodically, especially when extremist groups exploited sanctuaries across borders. Though bilateral cooperation improved significantly in the past decade, especially during the tenure of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, apprehensions have not entirely disappeared.

Adding to the complexity are fringe narratives within Bangladesh that periodically invoke the vulnerability of India's Siliguri Corridor—often referred to as the "Chicken's Neck"—the narrow land bridge linking the Northeast to mainland India. While such rhetoric is largely confined to marginal or motivated voices, it feeds suspicion in border states.

Some hyper-nationalist elements in Bangladesh have even floated expansionist fantasies about a "greater Banglathan," imagining the incorporation of parts of eastern India, Bhutan, or Tibet into a geographically and economically "complete" state with coastline, fertile valleys, and mountains. These ideas remain fringe and impractical, yet their circulation—especially online—adds to the unease in India's Northeast.

The Shadow of Sheikh Hasina
The new political environment cannot be understood without reference to the dramatic exit of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024. After widespread unrest and political upheaval, Hasina left Bangladesh and sought shelter in New Delhi. Thousands of leaders and workers of the

diplomatic irritant. The interim administration led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus repeatedly sought her extradition, as she faces a death sentence handed down by a Bangladeshi tribunal. India did not accede to the request, citing legal and procedural complexities.

During the campaign and after assuming office, Tarique Rahman refrained from inflammatory remarks about Hasina. He maintained that any issue regarding her repatriation should be handled strictly through legal channels. This measured stance may be an early indicator that Dhaka under the BNP does not wish to allow the Hasina question to derail bilateral engagement with India.

India's Swift Outreach
Prime Minister Narendra Modi was quick to congratulate the BNP on its decisive victory. He became the first global leader to speak with Tarique Rahman following the results, expressing India's readiness to work closely with the new government for mutual benefit. The BNP leadership publicly welcomed Modi's outreach, emphasizing a desire to strengthen multifaceted ties guided by mutual respect and sensitivity to each other's concerns. Modi extended an invitation to Rahman and his family to visit India at a convenient time.

Although Modi could not attend the swearing-in ceremony in person, India was represented by Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, at the event held in the southern courtyard of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Such diplomatic gestures matter. They set the tone for future negotiations on trade, transit, water-sharing, border fencing, and counterterrorism cooperation.

Minority Representation and Internal Signals
Bangladesh's recent years have drawn international attention for reported attacks on religious minorities. Hindus, who once constituted over 22 percent of the population at the time of Partition, now account for roughly 8 percent—around 13 million people.

In the latest election, four non-Muslim candidates won seats, including

Two other minority leaders, Saching Pru and Dipen Dewan, were nominated by the BNP. Rahman included Roy Chowdhury and Dewan in his cabinet.

These inclusions carry symbolic weight. For India, where minority rights in Bangladesh often feature in public discourse and parliamentary debates, such gestures could serve as confidence-building measures.

However, symbolism alone may not suffice. The protection of minorities, prevention of targeted violence, and prosecution of perpetrators will be watched closely in both New Delhi and the northeastern capitals.

The Rise of Jamaat-e-Islami
Even as the BNP secured a comfortable majority, the emergence of Ban-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

"Ghar" is such a beautiful word. We say it so effortlessly- ghar ja raha hoon, ghar par hoon, yahin ghar hai mera. Yet in that one word lives comfort, calm, and belonging. It may be big or small, simple or fancy, but it holds our memories, our pauses, our heart. More than a place, ghar is where we emotionally belong.

~ Harsh Goenka, Chairman RPG Enterprises



gladesh Jamaat-e-Islami as the principal opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad marks a significant development. Historically opposed to Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war, Jamaat has now entered Parliament with 77 seats as part of an 11-party alliance. The party, led by Shafiqur Rahman, secured 68 constituencies, many near the West Bengal border. For the first time, Jamaat occupies the formal space of opposition leader in Parliament. This has strategic implications. While parliamentary participation could moderate the party's approach, its ideological moorings raise concerns in India—especially in border states wary of cross-border radical networks. Complicating matters further, the newly formed National Citizen Party—born out of the student-led July-August 2024 uprising against Hasina-aligned with Jamaat and secured six seats. Though numerically modest, such alliances indicate shifting political alignments that New Delhi will monitor closely.

Connectivity: Opportunity and Anxiety

Bangladesh sits at the heart of South Asia's connectivity map. It offers the shortest transit routes between India's mainland and the Northeast, as well as access to ports for Nepal and Bhutan. Under previous administrations, progress was made on road, rail, and inland waterway connectivity.



Eastern India's Stake in Bangladesh's Stability
The geography of Bangladesh en-



Awami League followed suit or faced legal action at home.
Her presence in India became a

two Hindus-Goyeshwar Chandra Roy and Nitai Roy Chowdhury—who defeated candidates from Jamaat-e-Islami.

'I Will Act as a Bridge for Congress Leaders to Join BJP': Bhupen Borah After Switch

GUWAHATI

In a significant political development ahead of the Assam Assembly elections, former Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Bhupen Kumar Borah formally joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at Vajpayee Bhawan in Guwahati on Sunday.

Soon after his induction, Borah launched a scathing attack on the Congress leadership, describing his decision to switch sides as a matter of "self-respect" and hinting at a possible exodus of more leaders from the party in the days ahead.

Addressing reporters, Borah said his entry into the BJP was only the beginning of a larger political shift.

"Not all leaders have come today. Those who have not sought candidature

have come. I have been invited to join the BJP, and I believe this is just the beginning," he said.

He suggested that once the Congress releases its list of candidates for the upcoming elections, more leaders from Rajiv Bhawan - the state Congress headquarters in Guwahati - could follow suit.

According to Borah, dissatisfaction with the party's internal functioning has been simmering among several senior leaders. "Many frontline Congress leaders with self-respect will come to Vajpayee Bhawan. I will act as a bridge for them, just like the historic Saraihat Bridge, helping them transition," he said, drawing a symbolic comparison to Assam's iconic river crossing.

Borah characterised his departure from the Congress as a decision rooted in personal dignity and political prin-



ciple. Without naming individuals, he indicated that discontent within the party structure had alienated several long-serving leaders.

In a dramatic analogy, he compared Congress leaders who remain in the party despite grievances to Karna from the

Mahabharata - a loyal yet under-recognised warrior. The remark underscored his contention that dedication and sacrifice within the party were not adequately acknowledged.

Recalling his tenure as APCC chief, Borah said he had endured physical at-

tacks while leading protests against the BJP. "When I was in Congress, I faced bloodshed while leading rallies against the BJP. I am perhaps the first Congress president in Assam who had to endure such an incident. I believe the BJP will give due recognition to that sacrifice," he stated.

Welcoming Borah into the party fold, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the former Congress president had entered a "new phase" of his political career. "From today, his identity with the Congress is completely erased. Whatever differences existed in the past are forgotten. We welcome him and look forward to working together," Sarma said.

The induction ceremony at Vajpayee Bhawan was attended by senior BJP leaders and workers, marking what party insiders described as a strategic addi-

tion ahead of the polls.

Borah's switch is being viewed as a setback for the Congress in Assam, particularly given his recent role as state unit chief. His public assertion that he would facilitate the entry of other Congress leaders into the BJP suggests potential turbulence within the opposition ranks.

While the Congress leadership has yet to issue a detailed response, political observers note that such high-profile defections could influence candidate selection dynamics and electoral alignments in the run-up to the Assembly elections.

For now, Borah has signalled his intention to play an active role in broadening the BJP's support base, positioning himself as a conduit for dissatisfied Congress leaders seeking a new political home.

Thangsko Fallout: 17,000 MT Coal, Explosives Seized in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills

SHILLONG

In a major crackdown following the Thangsko mine blast, Meghalaya Police have seized over 17,000 metric tonnes of coal and 25.5 kg of explosive materials from East Jaintia Hills district, intensifying enforcement against illegal mining and transportation.

East Jaintia Hills Superintendent of Police Pankaj Kumar Rasgania said the district police carried out the operation during the night of February 20-21, recovering the illegally mined coal and explosives from abandoned mines. No arrests were made during the specific raid, he added.

The action follows a suo motu statement by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma on the opening day of the Budget session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, where he announced the formation of a dedicated enforcement team to conduct daily drives against illegal coal mining and transportation.

The enforcement team comprises Executive Magistrates along with officials from the police and the mining and geology departments. The Chief Minister also informed the House that the state government has notified a judicial inquiry commission into the February 5 blast, while a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been constituted by the Director General of Police to probe the Thangsko incident and illegal mining activities in the state.

The intensified action comes in the wake of the February 5 explosion at an illegal coal mine in the Thangsko area of East Jaintia Hills, which claimed 34 lives and left several others injured. The tragedy triggered widespread outrage and renewed scrutiny of unlawful mining operations in the region.

SP Rasgania said that since February 5, a total of 94 FIRs have been registered and 22 persons arrested in connection with illegal mining and transportation of coal. He added that sustained enforcement drives are underway across vulnerable pockets of the district.

Gold Biscuits Worth Rs.80 Lakh Seized on Deoghar Weekly Express, One Arrested in Badarpur



OUR CORRESPONDENT

BADARPUR: In a major breakthrough, the Badarpur Railway Police arrested a young man and seized gold biscuits worth over 80 lakh during a special operation in Assam's Barak Valley.

The recovery was made during a search on the Deoghar Weekly Express (Train No. 15626). Railway Police said that during

checking, a passenger named Abhijit Debnath was found carrying five gold biscuits.

The total weight of the seized gold was 584.4 grams. Its market value is estimated to be more than 80 lakh.

Police said the accused is from Harichowdhuri Para in the Ranibazar area under Majlisapur police station in West Tripura. He was taken into custody on the spot.

Officials are now questioning him to find out where the gold came from and where it was being taken. They are also checking if the case is linked to a bigger smuggling network across states.

The seizure has drawn attention as it comes just before the Assam Assembly elections. Security has been tightened across railway routes due to fears of illegal transport of valuables during this period.

Railway Police said the probe is still on and more arrests or seizures may happen in the coming days.

GUWAHATI

The political sparring within the Assam unit of the Congress intensified on Sunday, with senior MP Rakibul Hussain launching a sharp rebuttal to former state party chief Bhupen Kumar Borah over his recent remarks alleging the existence of an "APCC(R)" faction within the party.

Reacting to Borah's statements following his resignation from the Congress and subsequent entry into the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hussain questioned both the credibility and timing of the allegations.

Referring to an earlier observation by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma that the term "APCC(R)" had been raised by Borah himself, Hussain dismissed the claim as lacking substance.

"If there is an APCC(R) in the Congress, why did Bhupen Borah not mention anything against me in his resignation letter?" Hussain asked, casting doubt over the seriousness of Borah's assertions.

Assam Congress Calls for 'Sacrifice' in Seat Talks, Admits Rajya Sabha Numbers Crunch

GUWAHATI

The Indian National Congress in Assam has appealed to its prospective alliance partners to approach seat-sharing negotiations in a "spirit of sacrifice," even as it acknowledged lacking the numerical strength to independently influence the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections.

Addressing the media after a high-level meeting with the party's central leadership in New Delhi on Saturday, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi indicated that discussions over seat distribution are nearing their final phase. He, however, cautioned against rigid bargaining.

"I don't believe we should get into fixed positions about how many seats one party must have or how many another should get. What is



important is to assess the ground reality within the available number of seats," Gogoi said.

He stressed that inflexible demands would undermine the broader objective of consolidating Opposition unity. "Every party needs to make adjustments and show flexibility. Congress has already made more sacrifices than

expected, and we are prepared to move forward with the same spirit," he added.

Describing the talks as being at a crucial juncture, Gogoi expressed optimism that a consensus could be reached if all stakeholders act with responsibility. "We are in the final stages of discussions. If everyone approaches the talks with a sense of cooperation, a solution can be achieved," he said.

The APCC chief also reiterated that the Congress has no alliance with the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), clarifying that no discussions have been held with the party regarding either the Assembly or the Rajya Sabha polls.

"We have clearly stated earlier that there is no understanding with the AIUDF. Everyone knows the number of MLAs Congress has. Given the present arithmetic, we

have not discussed any arrangement related to the Rajya Sabha elections," he said, candidly acknowledging the party's limited numbers in the Assembly.

The New Delhi meeting, attended by senior Assam Congress leaders including Rakibul Hussain, focused on ironing out internal differences and shaping a united strategy ahead of the Rajya Sabha contest.

Gogoi's remarks appeared to respond to recent public statements by regional leaders such as Akhil Gogoi and Lurinjyoti Gogoi, who have articulated their expectations from the Opposition alliance.

While no formal breakthrough was announced following the meeting, party sources indicated that negotiations remain active, with further discussions likely in the coming days as the Rajya Sabha election date approaches.

Hindu Samelan in Imphal Highlights Unity, Social Reform and Cultural Awakening

IMPHAL

A Hindu Samelan organised by the Hindu Samelan Samiti was held at Kalibari Mandir on Saturday, drawing devotees and community members from different parts of Manipur.

The gathering, hosted in Mantripukhri, centred on the themes of unity, social awakening and cultural preservation within the Hindu community, with speakers underlining the importance of collective harmony amid contemporary social challenges.

Emphasis on Sanatan Dharma and Universal Welfare

The chief speaker at the event was Baisistha Bujarbaruah, Assam Kshetra Pracharak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Addressing attendees, Bujarbaruah described Sanatan Dharma as an ancient spiritual tradition rooted in the principle of universal welfare. Referring to the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - the idea that the world is one family - he said the foundational message of the tradition is the well-being of all.

Quoting the Sanskrit verse "Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu



niramayah," he stressed that Hindu spiritual thought envisions happiness and health for every individual without distinction.

He further noted that the ultimate aim of human life, according to Hindu philosophy, transcends material suc-

cess and centres on self-realisation and recognition of the divine presence within. Highlighting the tradition of nature worship, he said Hindu belief regards divinity as omnipresent in all aspects of existence.

Also speaking at the event was Kh-

wairakpam Rajen Singh, Karyawah of the Assam Kshetra RSS, who emphasised the importance of unity within society. He observed that social disunity had historically weakened communities and cited the Seven Years Devastation in Manipur as an example of how internal divisions can lead to collective suffering.

Rajen Singh elaborated on the RSS initiative "Panch Parivartan" (five social transformations), which promotes social harmony, strengthening of family values, responsible citizenship, environmental awareness and self-reliance through the use of indigenous products.

He called for an end to discrimination in all forms and urged families to revive shared cultural and spiritual practices. Stressing the balance between rights and duties, he encouraged citizens to actively fulfil civic responsibilities. He also highlighted the need to conserve water, protect the environment and adopt sustainable lifestyles.

The Samelan concluded with cultural performances by local artists, fostering an atmosphere of devotion and community participation. Organisers said the event aimed to inspire social cohesion and cultural awakening while reinforcing shared values among attendees. The programme reflected ongoing efforts by community groups in Manipur to strengthen cultural identity and promote social reform through spiritual and civic engagement initiatives.

Also speaking at the event was Kh-

"Why Not Mention It in Resignation?" Rakibul Hussain Questions Bhupen Borah's APCC(R) Charge



Borah had earlier alleged that the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) had effectively turned into "APCC(R)," suggesting the emergence of an internal factional structure within the party. His comments have triggered strong counterattacks from party

colleagues, further exposing rifts within the state Congress.

Hussain also took aim at Borah's recent switch to the BJP, suggesting that the move had failed to create the political ripple the former APCC chief may have anticipated.

"Bhupen Borah could not even take 32 people along with him while joining the BJP," Hussain remarked, in an apparent attempt to underscore what he described as the limited impact of Borah's departure from the Congress.

The exchange marks the latest escalation in an increasingly public war of words between Congress leaders in Assam. Political observers note that the back-and-forth reflects deepening factional tensions within the party at a time when it is preparing for key electoral battles in the state.

While Borah has maintained that dissatisfaction within the party prompted his exit, his former colleagues have rejected his claims, framing them as post-resignation justifications rather than substantive organisational concerns.

With both sides trading barbs, the episode has further spotlighted the internal churn within the Congress in Assam, even as the BJP seeks to consolidate its position ahead of upcoming elections.

Foundation Stone Laid for Baladhan Tea Estate Nachghar with Rs 35 Lakh Allocation



OUR CORRESPONDENT

LAKHIPUR: In a step towards strengthening community infrastructure in the tea garden areas, the foundation stone for the Baladhan Tea Estate Nachghar was laid on Sunday by Kaushik Rai, MLA of Lakhimpur and Minister in the Government of Assam.

The project has been sanctioned with an allocation of Rs 35 lakh and aims to provide a dedicated cultural and social space for the local community of Baladhan Tea Estate.

The ceremony was at-

tended by panchayat representatives and senior party karyakartas, including Bijendra Prasad Singh, along with local residents who welcomed the initiative.

Speaking on the occasion, those present expressed hope that the Nachghar would serve as a centre for cultural activities, social gatherings, and community development in the tea estate area.

The project is expected to enhance local engagement and preserve cultural traditions while also improving social infrastructure in the region.

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India to weigh Israeli 'Sky Sting' long-range air-to-air missile during PM Modi visit



NEW DELHI

India is likely to advance discussions on procuring the Israeli-origin "Sky Sting" long-range beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel on Wednesday, it is learnt.

The missile, pitched with an engagement envelope of around 250 km, is being positioned to plug a critical gap in the Indian Air Force's (IAF) long-range air combat capability.

Sources said the proposal is likely to follow a phased route, with an initial off-the-shelf acquisition followed by localised production with Rafael Advanced Defence Systems. If taken forward, the system will subsequently undergo trials and integration validation before being inducted and operationalised.

Such a model would also align with India's push to balance immediate operational requirements with domestic

manufacturing under technology partnerships, similar to the HAMMER guided bombs being co-produced by Safran and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

"Israel has been pitching the missile for some time and it is now being considered for integration on the Tejas Mk1A, with the initial tranche equipped with the Israeli ELM-2052 AESA radar," a source said.

HAL's delivery delays of the fighter are understood to be partly due to integration challenges of the radar with the indigenous Astra BVRAAM. Given that 180 Tejas Mk1A aircraft are on order, the platform could also be equipped with this missile, the source added.

The Sky Sting, unveiled around three years ago, is under development and is understood to have reached a degree of technological maturity, though it has not yet been inducted into operational service.

India already operates a range of Rafael-origin systems, including the I-Derby ER and Python-5 air-to-air missiles, the SPYDER air defence system and precision strike weapons such as SPICE and Rampage. It is also a key partner in the development of the Barak-8 air defence system deployed across the three services.

The IAF's current BVRAAM inventory includes both indigenous and imported systems. The Astra Mk1, developed by DRDO and produced by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), has a range of around 110 km and forms the backbone of the indigenous capability. More advanced variants are under development, with the Astra Mk2 expected to extend the range beyond 200 km and the Astra Mk3, based on solid fuel ducted ramjet (SFDR) technology, projected to reach the 350 km class.

The IAF also operates Russian-origin R-77 missiles on its Su-30MKI fleet, alongside air to air missiles such as the Meteor with a range exceeding 200 km, the MICA with a range of up to 80 km and the I-Derby ER, providing a layered engagement capability.

The talks would follow a recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) inked between the Indian and Israeli defence ministries ahead of Prime Minister Modi's visit. The agreement aims to move beyond buyer-seller arrangements towards co-development and co-production of next-generation systems, while also strengthening industry ties between the two countries.

Eight arrested in alleged Delhi terror conspiracy; Bangladeshi nationals among suspects

NEW DELHI

The Special Cell of Delhi Police has arrested eight persons and dismantled a Bangladeshi module of highly radicalised individuals affiliated with Lashkar-e-Toiba, following coordinated raids in the national capital, Kolkata and Tamil Nadu. Police said the timely action averted possible terror strikes in India.

Of the eight arrested, seven are Bangladeshi nationals who had illegally entered India and procured Indian identity documents to conceal their nationality. Investigators said the module was recruited, indoctrinated and handled by a trained Kashmiri LeT handler operating from Bangladesh.

The module's main handler has been identified as Shabir Ahmad Lone, a resident of Srinagar, who is currently based in Bangladesh. Lone was earlier arrested by the Special Cell in 2007 in a terror case involving the recovery of arms and ammunition, including an AK-47 rifle and grenades. He remained lodged in Tihar Jail till 2018 before fleeing to Bangladesh, where he revived LeT networks in India and reactivated sleeper cells of Bangladeshi operatives.

The arrested accused have been identified as Umar Faruk (31), stated to be a resident of West Bengal; Robiul Islam (31); Mohammad Mizanur Rehman (32); Mohammad Sefayat Hossain (34); Mohammad Zahidul Islam (40); Mohammad Liton (40); Mohammad Uzzal (27); and Umar (32), all residents of Bangladesh. According to the police, the group was planning to target areas with heavy public footfall. The case came to light on February 8 after a written complaint was submitted by a CISF shift in-charge at the Supreme Court Metro police station regarding pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters being affixed by unknown persons at the Janpath Metro Station. During inquiry, similar posters were found at several other locations in Delhi.

Police said the posters carried



photographs glorifying slain Burhan Wani of Jaish-e-Mohammad and other militants. One of the posters read "India stop genocide & Free Kashmir", along with Urdu slogans translating to "Hum Pakistani Hain, Pakistan Hamara Hai" and "Kashmiri Ek Jutta Divas". Additional Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said.

An FIR was registered at the Supreme Court Metro police station and the investigation was transferred to the Special Cell. Investigators traced the initial leads, which were subsequently developed into actionable operational intelligence.

The Special Cell had already been gathering inputs on LeT operatives and their Bangladeshi linkages in the wake of recent developments in Bangladesh. Based on technical analysis and manual verification, the movement of suspects was tracked in Delhi and Gurugram, eventually leading investigators to Kolkata. On February 15, the hideout of the Kolkata module was identified at Majherpara in Hattiar Gote area, following which a raid was conducted and Umar and Robiul Islam were arrested. Subsequently, on February 21, hideouts of the Tamil Nadu module were identified, and six cadres were arrested from Tiruppur in simultaneous raids. During searches, multiple pro-Pakistan and pro-terror post-

ers were recovered from the rented accommodations of the accused. Police also found posters affixed at several locations in West Bengal. Ten mobile phones containing incriminating material, 25 credit and debit cards, five POS machines, Bangladeshi passports and identity cards were seized.

During interrogation, Faruk revealed that he came in contact with Lone in March 2025 and was gradually indoctrinated. Lone later appointed Faruk to spearhead LeT operations in India, with a plan to use Bangladeshi nationals posing as Indian citizens to carry out terror attacks.

In December 2025, Lone directed Faruk to conduct reconnaissance of important locations across the country and to send videos after the receipt. Following the reconnaissance, Faruk was instructed to visit Lone in Bangladesh for further directions and was tasked with recruiting more Bangladeshi nationals illegally residing in India. As per Lone's instructions, Faruk rented a hideout in Kolkata and shared its details with him. The premises were meant to serve as both a safe house and a base for terror activities. Lone also directed Faruk to arrange weapons, following which Faruk began contacting local sources. On February 6, Faruk and Robiul Islam travelled from Kolkata to Delhi via Patna. During the night of February 7, they affixed pro-Pakistan

and pro-terror posters at 10 locations in Delhi, filmed the act and sent the videos to Lone, before returning to Kolkata by train the next day. Lone later congratulated them and instructed them to carry out similar activities in Kolkata as well.

Police said Lone was assisted by another accomplice, Saidul Islam, a Bangladeshi national currently believed to be in a foreign country. Saidul allegedly facilitated Lone's illegal entry into Bangladesh, arranged his hideout there, and also provided details of the Tamil Nadu-based LeT operatives to Lone and Faruk.

Faruk and Robiul Islam subsequently affixed posters at multiple locations in Kolkata, recorded videos and shared them with Lone. Investigators said Lone was actively planning terror incidents in India using Bangladeshi nationals.

Police further stated that Lone had direct links with LeT's top leadership, including Hafiz Saeed and his deputy Zaki Ur Rehman Lakhvi, at the time of his arrest in 2007. A trained militant of LeT, Lone underwent Daurae-Aam (basic training) and Daurae-Khaas (advanced training) at the Muzaffarabad LeT camp.

He is allegedly backed and funded by Inter-Services Intelligence to recruit Bangladeshi youth illegally residing in India for planning and executing terror plots, police said.

INTERNATIONAL

Ruling against Trump's tariffs creates new uncertainty in US trade relations with China

WASHINGTON

The Supreme Court decision striking down President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs has added a wrinkle to already complicated US-China relations, with both countries navigating shifting ground to avoid an all-out trade war that would disrupt the global economy while still jostling for a position of strength in negotiations.

Friday's court ruling would seem to strengthen China's hand, but analysts predict that Beijing will be cautious in exploiting the advantage, knowing that Trump has other ways of levying taxes. Both sides also want to maintain a fragile trade truce and stabilize ties ahead of Trump's highly anticipated trip to Beijing.

"It will give China a moral boost in their negotiations with Trump's team ahead of the summit, but they are prepared for the scenario that nothing actually changes in reality," said Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, a Washington-based think tank.

Furious about the defeat, Trump said first he was imposing a temporary 10% global tariff before raising it to 15% as well as pursuing alternative paths for import duties. He made the case for tariffs by pointing to China, which poses the biggest challenge to US economic, technological and military dominance.

"China had hundreds of billions of dollars in surpluses with the United States. They rebuilt China. They rebuilt the army. We built China's army by allowing that to happen," Trump told reporters Friday. "I have a great relationship with President Xi, but he respects our country now."

The White House has confirmed that Trump will travel to China on March 31 through April 2 to meet President Xi Jinping.

Xi is unlikely to "flaunt or brandish" the Supreme Court ruling forcefully when meeting Trump, likely



choosing instead to try to strengthen his rapport with the US president, said Ali Wyne, a senior research and advocacy adviser focused on US policy toward China at the International Crisis Group. The more that Xi can do that, "the more likely it is that the fragile trade truce between the United States and China will take hold in earnest and that Trump will be amenable to security concessions that give China greater freedom of maneuver in Asia," Wyne said. Asked for comment on the implications of the court ruling, Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said only that tariff and trade wars serve neither country's interest. He called for Beijing and Washington to work together to "provide greater certainty and stability for China-US economic and trade cooperation and the global economy."

The court decision also creates new uncertainty for other US trading partners, in Asia and elsewhere, especially those that have reached trade deals to

calm the initial turmoil from Trump's tariffs.

"I would expect most Asian partners to proceed cautiously, with existing agreements largely holding as both sides work through the implications in the coming weeks," said Dan Kritenbrink, a partner at The Asia Group who served as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs in the Biden administration.

He said he would be watching the impact on Japan ahead of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's planned visit to Washington in March. Japan, a staunch US ally, has seen its relations with Beijing deteriorate in recent months.

Shortly after Trump returned to the White House early last year, he invoked an emergency powers law and slapped 20% tariffs on Chinese goods over what he said was Beijing's failure to stem the flow of chemicals that can be used to makeentanyl.

Trump later invoked the same

emergency authority to impose sweeping reciprocal tariffs on many countries, including 34% on China. Beijing retaliated, and the tariffs temporarily soared to triple digits before both sides climbed down.

After several rounds of trade talks and a summit between Trump and Xi in South Korea in October, the two countries agreed to a one-year truce with a 10% baseline tariff. Trump also slashed the so-called fentanyl tariff to 10%, while Beijing resumed its cooperation in restricting the export of more substances that could be used to make the opioid.

Wendy Cutler, vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute, said she suspected the Trump administration could roll out a Plan B quickly. The Office of the US Trade Representative has an active investigation into China's compliance with a previous trade agreement and that could be the administration's backup plan, she said. If China is found not to be fulfilling its obligations under the agreement, the US government is allowed under a trade law to impose tariffs.

Rep. Ro Khanna, the top Democrat on the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, urged the administration to come up with a new, tougher strategy that "holds China accountable for its unfair trade practices and leverages the collective power of our allies and partners."

Gabriel Wildau, a managing director focused on political risk analysis in China at the consultancy Teneo, said Trump has already shown his willingness to use other legal authorities to impose tariffs on China, as he did during his first term, and Beijing probably assumes that the tariffs could be maintained or re-created "with only modest difficulty."

"But Beijing also holds out hope that they can persuade Trump to lower this tariff in exchange for purchase guarantees or other concessions," Wildau said.

Islamic State lashes out at Syria's interim president as 'puppet without a soul,' urges new attacks



BEIRUT

The Islamic State group has blasted Syria's interim president Ahmad al-Sharaa calling him a "puppet without a soul" controlled by Western countries, adding that his fate eventually will be similar to that of ousted leader Bashar al-Assad.

In an audio message released on Saturday by the group's spokesman, who identifies himself as Abu Huzafa al-Ansari, he called on IS followers around the world to attack Jewish and Western targets as they have in past years.

Al-Ansari sent greetings to IS fighters from the group's leader Abu Hafz al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi who was named as the head of the group three years ago.

The audio is the first to be released by the group in months and comes after IS was blamed for attacks that left dozens dead or wounded in recent months in Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and other parts of the world.

In December, the group was blamed for an attack in central Syria that left three Americans dead and triggered intense US airstrikes on the extremists' suspected hideouts in the country.

Despite its defeat in Iraq in 2017 and in Syria two years later, IS sleeper cells still carry out deadly attacks in both countries, where they once declared a caliphate.

The UN chief said earlier this month in a report on threats posed by IS that Syria's president, interior minister and foreign minister were the targets of five foiled assassination attempts last year.

In December 2024, insurgents led by now interim President al-Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, marched to Damascus and removed then-President Bashar Assad from power, striking a severe blow to Iran's influence in the war-torn country. Assad belonged to the minority Alawite sect in the predominantly Sunni Muslim country.

Since then, al-Sharaa, a former leader of al-Qaida's branch in Syria, has improved his relations with Western countries and last year became the first Syrian head of state to visit Washington since Syria's independence in 1946. Al-Ansari said that Iran and Assad in Syria were replaced "with a regime that is subjected to American influence."

"Syria today is ruled

by the Crusaders after they placed a leader who is a puppet without a soul," al-Ansari said. He vowed new attacks in the country saying that "Syria has entered a new era of defense and the convoys of jihad will eventually march in Syria."

The audio, which is supposed to mark the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan did not mention the transfer of 5,704 suspected IS detainees from prisons in northeast Syria to Iraq in recent weeks.

Al-Ansari only said that everyone is scared of the detainees whom the Americans, Shiites and Kurdish fighters are doing all they can to make sure they don't escape.

Al-Ansari also did not mention al-Hol camp that used to house more than 24,000 people, mostly women and children linked to IS, that is now almost empty after government forces took control of it last month from the US-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

He acknowledged that IS lost fighters over the past two years because of attacks by the US-led coalition against IS. The Syrian government officially joined the coalition in November.

Guwahati Terminal Expansion Strengthens Assam Connectivity, Lifts Capacity to 13.1 Million



GUWAHATI

The new terminal at Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport (LGBIA) began commercial operations this evening, raising annual passenger capacity to 13.1 million and reinforcing Guwahati's position as the principal aviation gateway to India's strategic North-Eastern region to South and Southeast Asia.

The transition followed a phased, operations-led activation, with live trials conducted across check-in, baggage handling, security and aircraft turnaround before full deployment. The terminal was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 20, 2025.

The commencement of operations was attended by Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma and Mr Jeet Adani, Director, Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL), India's largest private airport operator. The event was marked by the issuance of a ceremonial boarding pass to the first departing passenger and the arrival of an Akasa Air flight from Mumbai at the new facility. A traditional lamp-lighting ceremony and cultural performances were held in the arrivals forecourt, with participation from artisan communities, tea garden workers, frontline staff and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel, underscoring the region's cultural identity alongside infrastructure expansion.

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "I express my gratitude and we are thankful to Mr Gautam Adani for keeping his commitment of investing Rs 50,000 crore made during Advantage Assam 2.0, last year. I believe with the operationalisation of this new Terminal, As-

sum's tourism will get a boost. It will be a

gamechanger for Assam. The culture of Assam has been respected during the construction of this new airport terminal, and as Assamese, we are proud of it."

Mr Jeet Adani said the expansion reflects the region's evolving demand and long-term growth trajectory. "Today is more than a commercial milestone. It is a proud moment for the people of Assam and the North-East. This achievement belongs

recent years, the airport ranks among the country's top 10 to 12 busiest airports by passenger volume. The expanded 13.1 million capacity provides headroom for route additions, higher aircraft frequencies and international network growth.

The airport connects 21 domestic destinations and three international routes, including Bangkok, Paro and Singapore

systems are operational. Retail and food services are being introduced in stages.

Architecture and Cultural Identity

Designed by internationally acclaimed Indian architect Mr Nuru Karim, the terminal draws inspiration from Assam's kopou phool (foxtail orchid) and incorporates more than 140 metric tonnes (MT) of bamboo. Architectural references to Assam's bholuka bamboo craftsmanship and the bamboo-based structural traditions associated with the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh reflect the wider cultural fabric of the North-East.

A vaulted roofline enhances spatial continuity and natural light distribution, while an amphitheatre-style arrivals forecourt introduces travellers to regional art and performance traditions.

The design received the International Architecture Award 2025 for integrating regional identity with contemporary infrastructure.

The airport is operated

flagship company of the globally diversified Adani Group, is the largest private operator of airports in India. GIAL is responsible for the operation and modernisation of Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport (LGBI Airport), Guwahati, a key aviation asset and the gateway to Northeast India.

LGBI Airport (IATA: GAU, ICAO: VEGT) with a legacy spanning 67 years, serves as the premier gateway to Northeast India and continues to enhance air connectivity across domestic and international sectors. In FY 2024-25, the airport successfully managed 6.57 million passengers, including 91,594 international passengers and 1,009 international ATMs, along with 45,410 domestic ATMs, marking a significant expansion in global outreach.

With a 'digital-first' philosophy, LGBI Airport is committed to delivering a seamless passenger experience, leveraging state-of-the-art technology and modern infrastructure. As a key EXIM and logistics hub, LGBI



to the countless hands and hearts that turned vision into reality. It resonates with the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision for future-ready infrastructure and with the Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma's mission to position Assam as the economic engine of the North-East."

Traffic Growth and National Positioning

Guwahati has emerged as one of India's fastest-growing non-metro airports, recording consistent traffic expansion over the past decade. With throughput crossing nine million passengers in

and currently handles more than 130 aircraft traffic movements (ATMs) daily. The additional capacity is expected to strengthen Guwahati's role as a regional hub linking the North-East with mainland India and Southeast Asia.

System validation exercises covered airline coordination, ground handling, emergency protocols and digital integration. Digi Yatra-enabled processing, integrated wayfinding and centralised communication

by AAHL through its subsidiary Guwahati International Airport Limited (GIAL). AAHL also manages airports in Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Lucknow, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Mangaluru.

About Guwahati International Airport Limited (GIAL)

Guwahati International Airport Limited (GIAL) Guwahati, managed by Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), a subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Limited, the

Airport recorded 12,893 metric tonnes (MT) of cargo in FY 2024-25.

In December 2024, LGBI Airport was recognised for its commitment to customer excellence, achieving Level 2 accreditation by the Airports Council International (ACI) Airport Customer Experience programme. Further reinforcing its sustainability efforts, the airport received the prestigious Greentech PCWR Award 2024 for Waste Management & Recycling Leadership.

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