PERSPECTIVE

The unhappiest people in this world are the people who care the most about what everyone else thinks.

Meghalaya illegal coal mine blast toll climbs to 25; two arrested

SHILLONG

The death toll in the illegal coal mine explosion in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district rose to 25 on February 6, as search and rescue operations continued at the Mynsyngat-Thangsko mining area, police said.According to a press release issued by the Superintendent of Police, East Jaintia Hills, rescue teams recovered four additional bodies from inside the mine during operations on Friday. One injured miner undergoing treatment at the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) in Shillong also succumbed to injuries.Police said two more critically injured persons, who had sustained severe burns and injuries following the explosion and subsequent fire, later died. Their bodies were brought by family members to Civil Hospital, Khliehriat, and Civil Hospital, Jowai.With these deaths, the total toll has reached 25. Of the deceased, 17 bodies have been identified and handed over to their families after completion of legal formalities, officials said.

In connection with the incident, police have registered a suo motu FIR at Khliehriat Police Station (Case No. 14/2026) under Sections 105, 118(2) and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), read with Sections 21 and 21(1) of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, and Section 3 of the Explosive Substances Act.

So far, two persons have been arrested in the case. They have been identified as Forme Chyrmang (36), son of late Kom Dkhar of Jalaphet Pordung, and Shamehi War (42), son of Wiseman Syrti of Sutnga Pohwailong, both residents of East Jaintia Hills district. The accused were produced before a court and remanded to three days of police custody.

WHO SAID WHAT

"I Can See 100 Reliances In India" | Mukesh Ambani, CMD, Reliance Industries Ltd.

Manipur Cabinet moves to hold Panchayat elections after High Court directive

IMPHAL

The Manipur Cabinet has decided to conduct Panchayat elections at the earliest, acting on a directive issued by the Manipur High Court during the period of President's Rule, which mandated that the long-pending local body polls be held within six months.The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting held on Friday afternoon at the Chief Minister's Secretariat, presided over by Chief Minister Y. Khemchand. This was the second Cabinet meeting since he assumed office as the 13th Chief Minister of the state.

Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho, Cabinet Ministers Govindas Konthoujam and Khurajjam Loken, and Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel attended the meeting.Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen, a Kuki leader, joined the meeting virtually.The High Court of Manipur, in an order dated August 29, 2025, had directed the then President's Rule administration to conduct Panchayat elections within six months. The order was passed by a division bench comprising Chief Justice Kempaiah Somashekar and Justice Guneshwar Sharma while hearing petitions related to the prolonged delay in local body elections. Panchayat polls in Manipur were last held in 2017.

The sixth general election to Panchayats in the state was originally scheduled for June 2023 but was cancelled due to the prevailing law and order situation amid prolonged unrest in the border state.

Sources said the Cabinet took up the issue following questions raised by Congress leader and Lok Sabha MP from Manipur, Bimol Akoijam, who sought clarification on the delay in holding Panchayat elections. Akoijam had asked whether the state government was taking steps to ensure timely conduct of the polls in keeping with the constitutional mandate of grassroots democracy, and what measures were being planned to overcome obstacles to the electoral process.Responding to Akoijam's query in the Lok Sabha, Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj S. P. Singh Baghel had stated that Panchayat elections in Manipur are often delayed due to administrative challenges, court cases and litigation, issues related to delimitation of Panchayats, and reservation of seats-matters that fall under the jurisdiction of the state government.

Manipur MP seeks electronics, garment PSUs to address job crisis

IMPHAL

Rajya Sabha MP and titular king of Manipur, Leishemba Sanajaoba, has urged the Union government to establish Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) in the state, particularly in the electronics, electrical and garment sectors, to boost industrial growth and address unemployment among educated youth.Raising the issue during the Zero Hour of the Rajya Sabha on Friday, the BJP MP said Manipur, with a population of around 30 lakh, lacks major industrial establishments and continues to struggle with limited employment opportunities despite a relatively high literacy rate.

Sanajaoba pointed out that there is not a single large industrial corporate house operating in Manipur, apart from a few small-scale enterprises. He argued that the establishment of PSUs would help absorb educated unemployed youth and contribute to the state's long-term economic development.Citing official data, he said Manipur's literacy rate stands at 76.94 per cent, according to the 2011 Census, while the state's unemployment rate is 4.7 per cent-significantly higher than the national average of 3.2 per cent. "Many educated youths in Manipur remain unemployed due to the lack of industrial opportunities," he said.

Meghalaya illegal coal mine blast toll climbs to 25; two arrested as investigation widens

SHILLONG

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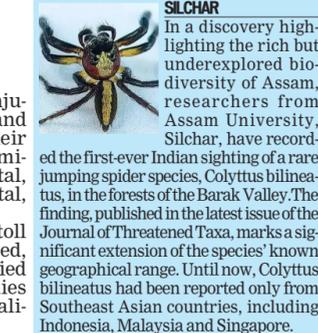
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Police said efforts are underway to identify and apprehend other individuals involved in the illegal mining operation. Search operations, investigation and related legal proceedings are continuing.

Rare jumping spider species recorded in India for first time in Assam's Barak Valley

SILCHAR

In a discovery highlighting the rich but underexplored biodiversity of Assam, researchers from Assam University, Silchar, have recorded the first-ever Indian sighting of a rare jumping spider species, Colyttus bilineatus, in the forests of the Barak Valley.The finding, published in the latest issue of the Journal of Threatened Taxa, marks a significant extension of the species' known geographical range. Until now, Colyttus bilineatus had been reported only from Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

The research was conducted by Assam University scholar Monica Chetry under the supervision of Professor Parthankar Choudhury, in collaboration with noted arachnologist John T.D. Caleb of Saveetha University, Chennai. The spider was discovered in the Loharbond area of Cachar district, within an Inner Line Reserved Forest known for its high but largely unexplored biodiversity.Researchers said the discovery reinforces Assam's importance within the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, one of the most species-rich yet least studied ecological regions in the world. "Assam's forests continue to be a frontier for biological discovery," Prof Choudhury said, recalling earlier notable findings from the Barak Valley, such as the Man-face stink bug (Catacanthus incarnatus) reported from Pailapool in 2003 and the walking leaf insect discovered in Katlicherra in 2006. Emphasising the ecological significance of the find, Chetry said the discovery highlights the need to study lesser-known life forms. "Assam's biological richness is not defined only by large animals and birds. It is equally shaped by small, often overlooked microfauna," she said.

Isolated pockets in Assam show groundwater contamination by arsenic and heavy metals: Centre

NEW DELHI

Some isolated areas in Assam have reported groundwater contamination, including the presence of arsenic and other heavy metals beyond permissible limits for drinking water, the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti informed the Lok Sabha on Thursday.

Replying to a written question by Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, Minister of State for Jal Shakti Raj Bhushan Choudhary said assessments conducted by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) indicate that groundwater in Assam is largely safe for drinking purposes overall. However, he acknowledged that certain pockets have recorded contaminant levels exceeding prescribed safety standards.

"Groundwater quality assessments show that while most parts of Assam have potable groundwater, a few isolated locations have reported the presence of contaminants, including heavy metals such as arsenic, beyond safe limits," the minister said.

Choudhary cautioned that prolonged consumption of arsenic-contaminated groundwater could pose serious health risks. He added that further detailed scientific studies are needed to establish a clear correlation between arsenic exposure and disease patterns in the state.

The minister said the CGWB carries out regular monitoring of groundwater quality across the country under its national programme, following standard scientific protocols to assess chemical and physical parameters.

He also explained that arsenic contamination is largely geogenic in nature, meaning it originates from natural geological formations. Arsenic present in soil and rocks can dissolve into groundwater and, over time, enter the food chain.

Highlighting the division of responsibilities, Choudhary noted that water is a state subject under the Constitution, and therefore the management of groundwater resources and mitigation of contamination fall primarily under the jurisdiction of state governments. "The Central government supports states by providing technical assistance and financial aid through various schemes and projects," he said.The disclosure comes amid growing concerns over drinking water safety in parts of Assam, particularly in areas known to be vulnerable to naturally occurring contaminants like arsenic.

Voice from Manipur at the United Nations AI Summit

BANGKOK

At a time when artificial intelligence is changing how the world works, a strong voice from Manipur found space at the United Nations. A three-day global AI summit held in Bangkok brought big questions to the table. Who controls AI. Who benefits from it. And who is left out.

The summit was organised by AI for Developing Countries. It drew more than 600 delegates from over 150 nations. Policymakers, tech experts, civil society leaders, and industry voices came together under one idea. AI should be for all, not for a few.

India was represented by Mr. Haobam Joyremba, Founder and Managing Director of CubeTen Technologies Pvt. Ltd. This was his third appearance at the United Nations, after earlier engagements in Geneva and Vienna. His presence mattered. It showed how voices from smaller states and regions can speak at global tables, and be heard.

During the Bangkok summit, several working groups were formed. Mr. Joyremba joined two key groups. One focused on AI for Smaller Communities. The other looked at AI for Governance. In both spaces, he spoke about the real needs of small states and regions like Manipur.

He said AI can help governance in powerful ways. It can improve public services, bring more transparency, support better planning, and help governments talk to citizens. But this only works if AI understands local reality. Language, culture, data, and context matter.

He raised a serious concern. Many smaller regions do not have enough digital data. Because of this, they remain invisible to large AI systems and language models. When data is missing, voices disappear. And when voices disappear, decisions are made without them.Another major issue he highlighted was control. Today, much of the world's digital and AI infrastructure is owned by a few global technology companies. This creates dependency. For developing countries and small administrations, it can mean technological lock-in, loss of data control, and long-term risk.

He warned that without strong action, the Global South may stay only as users of AI. Not creators. Not partners. Just consumers.

The summit also discussed digital colonisation. In many cases, money flows out through licenses, while local needs remain unsolved. Languages, traditions, and cultural systems face the risk of being ignored or diluted. Protecting indigenous languages and local governance systems through responsible AI design became a key theme.

The Bangkok summit is expected to produce a consolidated policy document. This document will capture concerns, ideas, and recommendations raised during the sessions.

It is likely to be pushed for formal acceptance by member countries. If adopted, it could help shape future global rules on AI sovereignty, inclusive governance, and fair technology development.

From Manipur to the United Nations, the message was clear. AI must not deepen old gaps. It must help bridge them.

PM Modi's gamosa gesture boosts global visibility of Assam's GI-tagged handloom, says Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on February 6 said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's gesture of welcoming students with the traditional gamosa during Pariksha Pe Charcha has significantly enhanced the national and international visibility of Assam's GI-tagged handloom.Sarma said the gesture highlighted both the cultural and economic significance of the gamosa, a traditional Assamese scarf and towel woven by lakhs of women across the state. He noted that the Prime Minister's frequent use of the gamosa at public events has helped bring the handloom tradition into the national spotlight, particularly among younger audiences.

Describing the act as an affirmation of Assam's heritage, the chief minister said the Prime Minister's acknowledgement has elevated the gamosa as an enduring symbol of Assamese identity while amplifying its recognition beyond the state. Such gestures, he added, strengthen cultural pride and promote wider awareness of indigenous crafts.Sarma further said the Prime Minister's affinity for Assam is reflected not only through cultural symbolism but also through sustained engagement with the state via development initiatives and major infrastructure projects. This continued support, he said, has boosted confidence within the weaving community, especially among women artisans who play a central role in preserving the tradition.Expressing gratitude on behalf of the people of Assam, Sarma said the recognition serves as encouragement for weavers and reinforces the value of their craftsmanship. He added that showcasing the gamosa on prominent national platforms contributes to sustaining livelihoods while preserving the state's cultural heritage.Launched in 2018, Pariksha Pe Charcha began as a town hall-style interaction with students and has since evolved into one of the country's largest education-focused outreach programmes, aimed at addressing exam-related stress and fostering dialogue among students, teachers and parents.

INDIA US ECONOMIC RESET

The latest India-United States trade understanding marks another major milestone in India's evolving global economic strategy, coming soon after the European Union trade engagement and reinforcing India's positioning as a central pillar in global supply chains. At a time when geopolitical realignments are reshaping trade flows, this agreement has both immediate economic implications and long-term strategic significance. For India, this is particularly significant because the United States remains its largest export destination and a key source of demand for high-value technology, capital, and services. Bilateral trade between the two countries has already crossed the $120 billion mark in recent years, demonstrating the scale of economic interdependence and the importance of restoring stable trade conditions. The restoration of favourable tariff conditions effectively revives the momentum that existed when India-US trade routinely crossed the hundred-billion-dollar threshold, ensuring continuity rather than disruption in trade flows.

The outcome does not come as a surprise. Months of intense negotiations and sustained diplomatic backchannels signalled that both nations were working toward de-escalation. The latest agreement indicates that both sides were keen to avoid a prolonged economic confrontation, especially given the elevated global growth risks. Reducing tariffs at 18 percent immediately gives Indian manufacturers a competitive edge in the US market. In sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, auto components, engineering goods, and IT services-linked hardware supply chains, even a few percentage points of tariff reduction can significantly influence order flows and margins. Compared to competitors facing higher tariffs or cost structures, Indian exporters can quickly regain lost market share.

Unlike the EU trade framework, which may take time for regulatory alignment and phased implementation, the US deal is expected to deliver immediate commercial impact. Export orders can respond quickly to tariff reduction, logistics chains can stabilise, and investment decisions that were on hold can restart. For the Indian industry, this is a time-sensitive opportunity to scale production and capture dual market demand from both Europe and the United States. This is crucial because exports are directly linked to employment generation. Lakhs of jobs-especially in MSMEs, manufacturing clusters, and export-oriented industrial zones-depend on sustained global demand. The US deal, therefore, provides a critical breather at a time when global demand cycles remain uncertain.

The deal also reflects a larger reality: no major economy can afford to ignore India's market size. With a population of over 1.4 billion and rapidly expanding middle-class consumption, India has become indispensable for global manufacturers. The EU has already demonstrated this through its deepening engagement, and the US is following a similar path-balancing market access demands with strategic partnership goals. The United States' willingness to cater to India's energy and technology needs is another important dimension.

However, the cost dynamics, supply commitments, and long-term pricing structures remain key variables. Energy dependence on any single geography carries strategic implications, and policymakers will need to balance economic benefits with energy security considerations.

The agreement is already generating optimism among investors. Foreign institutional investment flows, currency stability expectations, and stock market buoyancy indicate renewed confidence. Investor confidence is the backbone of capital markets, and trade stability is a major driver of that confidence. The coming months could see increased FDI inflows, particularly in manufacturing, electronics, defence production, and supply chain diversification.

However, apprehensions remain, particularly in agriculture. Farmer groups have already voiced concerns about a potential influx of subsidised US agricultural produce, which could affect Indian farmers if market protections are reduced too quickly. Policymakers will need to ensure that liberalisation is calibrated and sector-specific, rather than blanket-based. At the same time, competition can benefit consumers by improving product quality and lowering prices. The challenge lies in balancing consumer gains with producer protection, especially in a country where agriculture supports millions of livelihoods.

The deal is likely to open new areas of cooperation beyond trade-particularly in defence technology, digital economy frameworks, semiconductor supply chains, and critical minerals. For two of the world's largest democracies, economic cooperation increasingly overlaps with strategic and geopolitical alignment. The India-US trade reset signals a renewed mega partnership. For India, the moment represents a golden opportunity to scale manufacturing, expand exports, and strengthen its position as a global economic powerhouse.

UNION BUDGET 2026 AND THE CASE FOR LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT

SHAGUN PARIHAR

Instead of looking for dramatic headlines, the Union Budget 2026-2027 should be interpreted as a declaration of strategic intent. The Budget reflects a governance approach that prioritizes continuity, capacity-building, and long-term results in a time of global economic uncertainty, climate pressures, and rapid technological change. It upholds the idea that long-term national advancement results from consistent investment in the individuals, organizations, and systems that influence daily life rather than depending on populist short cuts. It is more important to strengthen the foundations that will define India's growth trajectory in the coming decades.

Education stands out as one of the clearest expressions of this long-term thinking. The budget represents a significant and intentional policy push in the direction of enhancing educational infrastructure, bolstering institutions, increasing skill development, and fostering innovation and research. Today, education is a major economic engine rather than only a social sector issue. In a knowledge-driven global economy, productivity, innovation, and competitiveness are determined by a workforce that is both skilled and flexible. By placing a high priority on education, the Budget acknowledges that human capital is the most precious and durable type of national infrastructure, crucial for social stability, democratic resilience, and economic progress.

Equally important is the renewed focus on housing and drinking water, two sectors that directly shape the quality of life and dignity of citizens. The Budget marks a significantly higher allocation compared to the previous Budget cycle for both housing and water-related interventions, reflecting a clear policy choice rather than incremental adjustment. Secure housing provides families with stability, safety, and a sense of permanence, enabling them to participate more confidently in economic and social life. It also supports labour mobility and local employment, creating multiplier effects across the economy. Housing, in this sense, is not merely about shelter but about empowerment.

Access to clean drinking water remains one of the most transformative public investments. Reliable water supply has immediate and measurable effects on health outcomes, productivity, and household well-being. It reduces the daily burden on women, improves child health, and strengthens rural and semi-urban economies. The decision to scale up investment in this sector compared to the previous year reflects an understanding that development cannot be sustained unless basic services are assured. Water security is not a peripheral concern; it is central to public health, social equity, and economic participation.

What gives coherence to these priorities is the way the Budget integrates social development with economic strategy. Education, housing, and water are treated not as isolated welfare measures but as interconnected foundations of growth. When households have access to basic services, they are better positioned to invest in education, participate in the workforce, and respond to economic opportunities. Poverty reduction, in this framework, is achieved through capability-building rather than temporary relief. It reflects a shift from managing deprivation to enabling aspiration.

A defining feature of the Budget is its strong emphasis on environmental responsibility and green growth. The government's approach recognises that climate change is no longer a distant environmental issue but an immediate economic challenge. Investments in renewable energy, clean infrastructure, sustainable urban development, and energy efficiency signal a decisive move towards climate-conscious planning. This approach treats sustainability not as a constraint on growth but as a pathway to future competitiveness.

The Budget's focus on emerging carbon markets and carbon trading technologies is particularly noteworthy. Carbon trading introduces market-based incentives for emissions reduction, encouraging innovation rather than compliance alone. By leveraging technology for measurement, reporting, and verification of emissions, carbon markets create transparency and credibility. This allows Indian industries to participate in global value chains that are increasingly shaped by sustainability standards. Carbon trading and climate finance thus become tools for economic transformation, attracting investment while aligning growth with environmental responsibility.

Green growth also has a direct employment and industrial dimension. Renewable energy, clean mobility, energy-efficient construction, and climate-resilient infrastructure are sectors with strong job-creation potential. By integrating environmental objectives into mainstream economic planning, the Budget avoids the false binary between growth and sustainability. Instead, it advances a model where economic expansion and ecological responsibility reinforce each other.

Capital expenditure continues to play a stabilizing role in this strategy. Infrastructure investment enhances productivity, strengthens supply chains, and supports private investment. While financial markets may respond to the Budget with short-term fluctuations, long-term confidence depends on policy consistency, fiscal discipline, and

clarity of direction. In this regard, the Budget reassures the middle class by balancing developmental ambition with responsible economic management.

Notably, the Budget avoids the temptation of populism. It focuses on steady delivery, institutional strengthening, and future readiness rather than quick fixes. The idea of Viksit Bharat finds expression here not as a slogan but as a policy framework that links human development, environmental responsibility, and economic resilience. Taken together, the Union Budget 2026-27 presents a thoughtful and forward-looking roadmap, reinforcing the belief that when governance prioritizes fundamentals and plans for the future, development becomes both inclusive and sustainable.

'Assamese or Miya?': CM Sarma challenges Congress under Gaurav Gogoi to clarify political stand

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma mounted a sharp political attack on the Congress, demanding that the party under the leadership of Gaurav Gogoi clearly state whether it stands with what he described as the interests of indigenous Assamese people or with the Miya community.

Speaking to the media in Dergaon after distributing cheques to women beneficiaries under state empowerment schemes, Sarma alleged that the Congress has undergone a fundamental ideological and organisational shift since Gogoi assumed leadership.

"The Congress party must clarify its stand in advance-whether it is on the side of the Assamese people or on the side of the Miyas. This question has become unavoidable today," the Chief Minister said.

Raising concerns over what he termed demographic pressure and land encroachment, Sarma claimed that infiltration over the years has resulted in large-scale occupation of land in Assam. He alleged that nearly 3.2 million bighas have been encroached upon, posing a threat to indigenous communities.

"Earlier, such settlements were largely confined to areas like Barpeta and Dhubri. Now we are seeing a movement towards places like Duliajan and Margherita," he said. "If this continues, where will the indigenous people of Assam stay, and where will they go?"

Referring to protests and slogan-shouting during the Congress's ongoing Parivartan Yatra, Sarma linked the reactions to growing public anxiety over land rights, identity and cultural preservation. He also cited alleged encroachments near religious and heritage sites, claiming these developments have intensified local resentment.

The Chief Minister further alleged that individuals "hostile to Assamese interests" have gained influence within the Congress since Gogoi took over, something he said was not the case during the leadership tenures of former state Congress presidents Ripun Bora and Bhupen Kumar Borah.

"During Ripun Bora and Bhupen Borah's time, such people had no space in the Congress. Today, under Gaurav Gogoi, anti-Assamese elements have found a place in the party's core functioning," Sarma alleged.

He specifically named Aman Udud, claiming that he plays a key role in the Congress social media cell, and linked him ideologically to Delhi-based activist Harsh Mander. Sarma alleged that both were associated with narratives that challenge established Assamese history and identity.

"These are the people advising Gaurav Gogoi today," Sarma said, adding that such narratives go against the interests and sentiments of Assamese society.

Sarma also accused the Congress social media machinery of engaging in what he described as "character assassination," alleging that it was being used to spread malicious rumours about his family. "Is this how politics should be conducted?" he asked.

He said issues related to Gogoi and what he referred to as "Pakistan-linked allegations" would be discussed in the state cabinet, after which he would address the media on February 8.

On alliance-related matters, Sarma said seat-sharing discussions between the BJP and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), including in Dergaon constituency, would be resolved through dialogue. "We do not believe in distributing tickets amid chaos. Decisions will be taken peacefully at the discussion table," he said.

Mizoram health minister stresses behavioural change to stem HIV spread

AIZAWL

Amid rising concern over high HIV prevalence in the Northeast, Mizoram Health Minister Lalrinpuii on February 6 emphasised the need for a behavioural approach as the first line of defence against new HIV infections.

Addressing the North East Multimedia Campaign (Red Fest) in Aizawl, the minister called for renewed focus on the 'ABC' approach-abstinence, being faithful to one partner, and correct and consistent use of condoms-which she described as the most effective method to prevent and control HIV transmission.

"The ABC approach remains the core principle in our fight against HIV. Returning to these basics is essential to ensure a risk-free future for our youth," Lalrinpuii said.The event was jointly organised by the Mizoram State AIDS Control Society (MSACS) and the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) as part of efforts to promote HIV/AIDS awareness across the Northeastern states.Lalrinpuii said the campaign seeks to educate young people about HIV/AIDS, promote healthy lifestyles and risk-free behaviour, improve access to treatment for those affected, and eliminate stigma associated with the disease.Expressing concern over the region's high HIV burden, she urged Northeastern states to intensify collective efforts to prevent further spread of the infection. "The Northeastern states continue to record the highest HIV prevalence in the country. With unity, sustained effort and hope, controlling HIV/AIDS is an achievable goal," she said.Chief Secretary Khilli Ram Meena, who was also present at the event, said discrimination remains a major barrier to HIV testing and treatment. He stressed that collective responsibility and empathy are essential to building a society in which people living with HIV can live with dignity and equal opportunity.

Section 163 imposed in Kokrajhar ahead of HSLC, HS examinations

KOKRAJHAR

Ahead of the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher Secondary (HS) examinations, 2026, the Kokrajhar district administration has imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, to ensure the smooth and fair conduct of the exams.

District Magistrate Pankaj Chakravarty on Thursday issued the order in view of the examinations scheduled from February 10 to March 16. The directive aims to prevent disturbances caused by noise pollution, large gatherings near examination centres and attempts to use unfair means.

A total of 31 HSLC examination centres and 22 HS examination centres have been set up across the district. The restrictions are intended to maintain peace, discipline and tranquillity in and around these centres throughout the examination period.

According to the notification, the entry of unauthorised persons-other than candidates and officials involved in conducting and monitoring the examinations-has been prohibited within a radius of 100 metres of the examination centres on exam days. The order also bans the assembly of three or more persons within the restricted zone, except examinees and authorised personnel.

The use of loudspeakers and high-decibel sound systems within a 200-metre radius of examination centres has been prohibited to avoid disturbances. In addition, carrying electronic communication devices such as smartwatches, health bands, electronic pens or scanners, Bluetooth devices, earphones, microphones or similar gadgets within 100 metres of the centres has been strictly banned.

The order further prohibits carrying weapons, explosives or any suspicious objects in the restricted area. Obstruction of traffic, illegal parking and the setting up of food stalls near the examination centres will also not be permitted.

Meghalaya mine blast: Assam sends senior officials as six workers from state die

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has deputed a team of senior officials to Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district to oversee rescue and relief operations after six labourers from Assam were killed in an explosion at an illegal coal mine on February 5.

Officials said all six deceased workers hailed from Cachar district. An official statement issued from Silchar confirmed that senior district-level officers have reached the blast site to co-ordinate response measures, facilitate inter-departmental support, and assist families of the victims.

Five injured workers have been admitted to Silchar Medical College and Hospital, where they are undergoing treatment under close medical supervision. Among the officials deployed to the site is Roktim Baruah, Additional District Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer of the District Disaster Management Authority, who is supervising operations on the ground.

The Assam administration has also coordinated with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), with teams from its 1st Battalion based at Patgaon being kept ready for deployment to reinforce rescue efforts if required. Officials said the situation is being monitored at the highest administrative level.

"All necessary support systems, including logistics, medical services and communication, have been activated to ensure effective response management," the statement said.

Earlier, the Assam government announced an ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh for the next of kin of each labourer from the state who died in the blast. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Assam Chief Secretary is in constant touch with his counterpart in Meghalaya to ensure coordination during rescue and relief operations.

Meanwhile, Meghalaya Police on Friday produced two persons, believed to be owners of illegal coal mines linked to the explosion, before a local court and secured three days of police custody. East Jaintia Hills Superintendent of Police Vikash Kumar said the overall death toll in the incident has risen to 25.

Rescue operations are continuing amid difficult conditions, with one of the mines rendered inaccessible due to a landslide. Teams from the State Disaster Response Force, NDRF, Border Security Force and medical units are engaged in search and rescue operations, while the Army and Air Force remain on standby.

Several workers are still feared trapped inside the mines, with families of at least six miners reporting their relatives missing. Nine seriously injured workers are currently undergoing treatment at various hospitals.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma has said stringent action will be taken against those responsible for the blast. He has deputed two Cabinet ministers to assess the situation on the ground, while senior police and mining department officials continue to remain stationed at the site.

Churachandpur sees cautious calm after protests over Kuki-Zo BJP MLAs joining Manipur government

IMPHAL

Normalcy began returning to parts of Manipur's Churachandpur district on February 6 after two days of unrest triggered by the participation of three BJP legislators from the Kuki-Zo and Hmar communities in the formation of the state's new popular government.

Police said the protests, which broke out on February 5, were largely confined to the Tuibong-Kangvai stretch of Churachandpur town. Demonstrations turned violent at a few locations, prompting authorities to reinforce security deployment to prevent escalation. No fresh incidents were reported on Friday, officials said.

Markets and shops reopened in several areas as daily activities gradually resumed, though many establishments in the Tuibong area remained shuttered. The district administration said the situation was under control, with additional security forces kept on standby to maintain law and order.

The unrest followed the swearing-in of BJP MLA Nemcha Kipgen as Deputy Chief Minister, along with MLAs LM Khaute and Ngursanglung Sanate, a move that drew sharp opposition from Kuki-Zo civil society organisations. Protesters alleged that the legislators' decision to join the government ran contrary to the collective position adopted by the community.

Tensions escalated after two tribal bodies imposed a "total shutdown" across Kuki-dominated areas of Churachandpur. Protest rallies were also held in Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal districts, where demonstrators accused the legislators of betraying community interests.

Kuki-Zo groups have been demanding a separate administrative arrangement, citing the ethnic violence that erupted in Manipur in May 2023 and the prolonged displacement of both Kuki-Zo and Meitei populations since then.

Meanwhile, the Zomi Council, the apex body of the Zomi tribe, has summoned the three legislators to explain their decision to join the government. In a statement issued on Friday night, the council said the MLAs were elected with the expectation that they would uphold the aspirations and collective will of the community.

Expressing disappointment over what it described as widespread public dismay, the council warned that failure to engage in dialogue could lead to "appropriate organisational measures," including restrictions on the legislators' entry into Zomi Council premises.

While the return of relative calm has brought temporary relief to Churachandpur, authorities acknowledge that political and social tensions in Manipur's hill districts continue to remain.

Owaisi hits out at Himanta Biswa Sarma over 'Miya Muslims' remark, calls it unconstitutional and divisive

NEW DELHI

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi on February 6 mounted a sharp attack on Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over his controversial remarks on "troubling Miya Muslims," describing them as unconstitutional, divisive and a threat to India's democratic ethos.

Mocking the chief minister's statement, Owaisi said, "I want to give you Rs 2 in alms," accusing Sarma of reducing constitutional governance to prejudice and intimidation. He asserted that the Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion or community.

"The Constitution says all are equal. No discrimination should be done, whether it is a chief minister or anyone else," Owaisi said, adding that no elected authority has the right to selectively target a section of citizens.

The AIMIM leader alleged that Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam were being routinely scapegoated for political ends. "If vegetable prices increase in Assam, Miya Muslims are blamed. If someone wants to vote, they are told to go to Bangladesh," he said, claiming that such rhetoric was designed to vilify an entire community.

Owaisi's remarks came in response to Sarma's recent comments advocating action against "Miya Muslims" in the state.

The chief minister had reportedly said, "Trouble the Miya Muslims by any means. If they face trouble, they will go from Assam... We are directly against the Miya Muslims. We are not hiding anything."

The statements have triggered a political storm in election-bound Assam, with opposition parties accusing the BJP of indulging in overt communal polarisation to consolidate votes. Critics have described the remarks as unprecedented for a constitutional authority and warned that such language could further deepen social and communal fault lines.

The BJP, however, has maintained that its position in Assam is focused on addressing illegal immigration and safeguarding the rights of indigenous communities. Bengali-speaking Muslims have frequently been labelled as "illegal infiltrators" in political discourse, an issue that continues to shape Assam's electoral and identity politics.

Congress predicts comeback in Assam in 2026, attacks BJP over Sixth Schedule, hill district concerns

GUWAHATI

The Congress asserted that it is set to return to power in Assam in the 2026 Assembly elections, claiming that public sentiment has turned decisively against the BJP-led government headed by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Addressing the media at Rajiv Bhawan in Haflong, AICC Media Department editor Happy Gogoi said the mood across the state clearly favours a change in government. He maintained that the BJP would be voted out after nearly a decade in power.

Speaking at the press interaction, AICC media in-charge Dr Anika Mehrotra said the Congress has already begun preparations for the upcoming polls, with the All India Congress Committee constituting multiple committees to oversee election-related work. She said these teams have started groundwork across Assam, while sharply criticising the BJP for what she described as its failure to resolve long-standing issues, particularly in hill districts such as Dima Hasao.

Dr Mehrotra alleged that tribal rights have been systematically weakened since the BJP assumed power in the state. She claimed that land belonging to indigenous tribal communities in the hill districts had been handed over to corporate houses, naming major business groups in the process. She said that if the Congress returns to power, the provisions of Article 244(A) under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution would be implemented "in letter and spirit."

She added that senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has already assured that effective implementation of Article 244(A) would be a priority once the party forms the government in Assam. According to her, the Congress has consistently worked for the protection of Sixth Schedule provisions, unlike the BJP, which she accused of undermining constitutional safeguards meant for tribal areas.

The Congress leader further alleged that people in Assam are increasingly afraid to speak out under the current regime. Drawing a contrast with the tenure of former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, she said the state had witnessed peace and development during the Congress era, with insurgency being addressed through dialogue, agreements and memoranda of understanding with militant groups. She accused the BJP of fostering divisions and pushing the state towards unrest through a "divide and rule" approach.

Raising concerns over electoral processes, Dr Mehrotra alleged that the BJP was attempting to manipulate voters' lists in the name of SIR. She warned that people would not remain silent and claimed that BJP candidates would face strong resistance on the ground during the elections. She said the Congress would continue to stand with the people in what she described as a decisive political battle.

Meanwhile, AICC media department editor Hepi Gogoi recalled promises made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the 2016 Assembly elections, including granting Scheduled Tribe status to six communities and permanently resolving Assam's flood problem. She alleged that neither promise had been fulfilled. Gogoi further claimed that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was aware that granting ST status to the six communities could weaken his political position.

Expressing confidence in the party's prospects, Congress leaders asserted that the formation of a Congress government in Assam in 2026 was "almost certain," citing growing public dissatisfaction with the BJP's performance over the past decade.

Railways now generating small revenue surplus: Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI

Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday said the financial health of the Railways has improved in the last 10 years, adding that the national transporter has a small revenue surplus after meeting all costs.

Replying to supplementaries during the Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha, the minister said 5.04 lakh jobs were generated during the 2014-24 period while another 1.5 lakh employment is being provided in the third term of the NDA government. Vaishnaw said there have been sustained efforts in the last 10 years to increase freight traffic and passenger revenue, besides controlling cost. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there has been a lot of improvement in the financial health of the Indian Railways in the last 10 years," he said in reply to a question by BJP member Laxmikant Bajpayee.

Vaishnaw said the railways staff cost stands at around Rs 1.18 lakh crore for about 12 lakh employees while 18 lakh pensioners cost Rs 65,000 crore. The energy cost is Rs 32,000 crore, finance cost Rs 23,000 crore and maintenance cost Rs 8,000 crore.

The overall cost of Railways is Rs 2.74 lakh crore, he added. "Railways is earning a small surplus after meeting all its costs because of the steps taken by the Centre in the last 10 years," Vaishnaw said.

"In the 2024-25 fiscal year, the operating ratio was 98.22%, gross traffic receipts Rs 2,65,114 crore and surplus Rs 2,660 crore," he said in a written reply.

Vaishnaw said the PM's decision to achieve complete electrification of the railway network has led to reduction in the energy cost besides providing immense environmental benefits. The diesel and electrical cost has reduced to about Rs 32,400 crore from Rs 37,841 crore four

years ago, despite increase in freight traffic, Vaishnaw said. He added that the Railways is having a small revenue surplus because of efficiencies in operations, especially saving of Rs 5,500 crore in energy cost, better maintenance practice, and increase in freight traffic by 400 million tonnes.

Vaishnaw said the government is providing a subsidy of Rs 60,000 crore to all passengers. The subsidy level is at 45% in the railway fare for passengers. He added that the recruitment process for 18,000 assistant loco pilots has been completed and their onboarding has begun.

Replying to another supplementary, Vaishnaw said the Modi government has paid significant attention to the Northeast, with the Budget increased to Rs 11,486 crore from Rs 2,000 crore during the UPA government. During the Zero Hour, the minister informed the House about progress in railway works in J&K and Kerala.

Sonia Gandhi calls revision plea 'frivolous and politically motivated', seeks its dismissal

NEW DELHI

Congress Leader Sonia Gandhi has opposed the criminal revision petition filed against her in the Rouse Avenue Court, stating in her reply that the plea is based on incorrect, misleading and speculative facts and is "wholly misconceived, frivolous, politically motivated and an abuse of the process of law."

In a reply filed through counsel before the Court of Special Judge (CBI) Vishal Gogne, she has contested the allegations relating to

her alleged inclusion in the electoral rolls prior to acquiring Indian citizenship and sought dismissal of the revision petition. The response adds that the complainant has made serious accusations in a reckless manner based on assumptions, media reports and personal presumptions rather than authentic records. It states that no specific document has been identified as having been forged or falsified and that the allegations lack material particulars.

Sonia Gandhi's reply further maintains that matters relating

to citizenship fall exclusively within the domain of the Central Government, while preparation and maintenance of electoral rolls is the statutory responsibility of the Election Commission of India. It contends that criminal courts cannot assume jurisdiction over such issues by entertaining private complaints, as this would amount to interference in the electoral process.

The response also disputes claims that her name was re-entered in the electoral roll on the basis of any application or forged documentation.

It states that the complainant has failed to place on record any authentic application or supporting record allegedly used for inclusion in the voter list, nor has any attempt been shown to obtain such documents through lawful means.

Denying further allegations, the reply rejects presumptions that fabricated government identity documents were used to obtain registration or that she cast a vote in the 1980 general election. It describes such claims as baseless assertions made without evidence.

The response also questions the reliance placed on old media reports, stating that such material does not carry legal recognition and cannot form the basis of criminal proceedings. It contends that the complainant is attempting to revive a controversy from 1980-83 after more than four decades without any foundational documentary proof, making the allegations stale and legally untenable.

Legal objections have also been raised regarding the maintainability of the complaint. The reply states that mandatory statutory requirements under the BNSS were not complied with, including proper filing of a valid affidavit, and therefore, the court lacks jurisdiction to entertain the complaint.

The revision petition has been filed by advocate Vikas Tripathi, challenging the Magistrate Court's September 2025 order, which had dismissed his earlier complaint at the threshold. The Magistrate had observed that issues relating to citizenship and electoral rolls fall within the jurisdiction of the Central Government and the Election Commission of India and cannot be adjudicated through a criminal complaint. Sonia Gandhi's reply, filed through advocates Tarannum Cheema, Kanishka Singh, Akash Singh and Akshay Nagarajan, seeks dismissal of the revision petition on the ground that it is based on conjectures, stale references and lacks any essential factual foundation.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump lifts 25% punitive tariffs on India but puts Russian oil imports under US monitoring

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump on Friday signed an executive order rescinding a 25% punitive tariff on Indian imports that had been imposed over India's purchases of Russian energy.

The White House said the move followed assurances from India that it would stop directly or indirectly importing Russian oil — assertions that New Delhi has not publicly confirmed.

In the executive order, Trump reiterated that India would stop buying Russian oil and increase imports of US energy.

"Specifically, India has committed to stop directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil, has represented that it will purchase United States

energy products from the United States, and has recently committed to a framework with the United States to expand defense cooperation over the next 10 years," the order said.

The document adds that India has taken "significant steps" to address US concerns over Russian oil purchases and to "align sufficiently with the United States on national security, foreign policy and economic matters."

India, however, has not endorsed Trump's claim that it will cease purchases of Russian energy. New Delhi has consistently defended its imports of discounted Russian crude, arguing that its decisions are guided by national interest and the need to ensure energy security for its vast population. Indian officials have previously said oil sourcing decisions are commercial in nature and factor in

evolving global dynamics.

Despite lifting the tariffs, the executive order makes clear that the relief is conditional. It establishes a formal US government monitoring mechanism to verify whether India has indeed stopped importing Russian oil, directly or indirectly. US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick has been tasked with overseeing this process, in coordination with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent.

US President Donald Trump speaks to reporters as he flies aboard Air Force One from Joint Base Andrews, Md., to West Palm Beach, Fla., Friday, Feb. 6, 2026.

'India is clearly reducing Russian oil imports': US Expert Lisa Curtis | US-India trade agreement

The order lays out a clear enforce-

ment trigger. "If the Secretary of Commerce finds that India has resumed directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil," it states, the Secretary of State—after consultations with senior Cabinet officials and White House advisers—"shall recommend whether and to what extent I should take additional action as to India, including whether I should reimpose the additional ad valorem rate of duty of 25 percent on imports of articles of India."

The list of officials involved in any such recommendation includes the Homeland Security Secretary, the US Trade Representative, the National Security Adviser, and senior presidential advisers on economic policy and trade, underscoring that the issue will be treated as both an economic and national security matter.

"The Secretary of Commerce, in coordination with the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, and any other senior official of the Secretary of Commerce deems appropriate, shall monitor whether India resumes directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil, as defined in section 7 of Executive Order 14329. If the Secretary of Commerce finds that India has resumed directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil, the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the United States Trade Representative, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, and the Assistant to the President and Senior Counselor for Trade and Manufacturing, shall recommend whether and to what extent I should take additional action as to India, including whether I should reimpose the additional ad valorem rate of duty of 25 percent on imports of articles of India," the order reads.

Trump says US talks with Iran 'very good', more negotiations expected

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said that Washington had "very good talks" on Iran after the two sides held an indirect dialogue in Oman, pledging another round of negotiations next week.

Iran for its part said it expected to hold more negotiations with the United States, hailing a "positive atmosphere" during a day of talks in the Gulf sultanate.

With an American naval group led by an aircraft carrier in Middle Eastern waters, US and Iranian delegations held talks in Muscat on Friday mediated by Oman without publicly meeting face-to-face.

"We likewise had very good talks on Iran," Trump told reporters on board Air Force One en route to his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

"We're going to meet again early next week," he added.

Shortly after the talks concluded, the US announced new sanctions against shipping entities and vessels, aimed at curbing Iran's oil exports.

Trump also signed an executive order Friday enabling his administration to impose tariffs on goods from countries doing business with Iran, with any potential levies threatening trade with countries including China, Germany and the United Arab Emirates.

It was not clear if the moves were linked to the talks, which were the first between the two foes since the United States joined Israel's war with Iran in June with strikes on its nuclear sites. While Iran warned against further threats after Washington raised the spectre of new military action, Trump said: "If they don't make a deal, the consequences are very steep."

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who led Iran's delegation in Muscat, said talks

"focused exclusively" on the Iranian nuclear program, which the West believes is aimed at making an atomic bomb but which Tehran insists is peaceful.

The US delegation, led by Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's influential son-in-law Jared Kushner, had also wanted Tehran's backing for militant groups, its ballistic missile program and treatment of protesters on the agenda.

"In a very positive atmosphere, our arguments were exchanged and the views of the other side were shared with us," Araghchi told Iranian state TV, adding that the two sides had "agreed to continue negotiations."

Speaking to the official IRNA news agency, Araghchi expressed hope that Washington would refrain from "threats and pressure" so that "the talks can continue."

Admiral Brad Cooper, the commander of US Central Command, was present at the talks, according to images published by the Oman News Agency.

Multiple sessions of talks in the morning and afternoon involved both sides shuttling to and from the residence of Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi.

The foreign ministry of US ally Qatar expressed hope the talks would "lead to a comprehensive agreement that serves the interests of both parties and enhances security and stability in the region." The White House has made clear it wants the talks to rein in Tehran's ability to make a nuclear weapon, an ambition the Islamic republic has always denied. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said on Friday that Iran should stop being a "destabilising power," citing its nuclear program and support for "terrorist" groups.

Barrot also called on "groups supported by Iran" to exert "the utmost restraint"

in the event of any military escalation involving the Islamic republic.

Tehran provides support for numerous groups in the region, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen and various armed groups in Iraq.

Trump initially threatened military action against Tehran over its crackdown on protesters last month, which rights groups say killed thousands, and even told demonstrators "help is on its way".

Regional powers including Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar urged the United States not to intervene, calling on Washington and Tehran to instead return to talks.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said Friday it has confirmed 6,505 protesters were killed, as well as 214 members of the security forces and 61 bystanders.

Those numbers are expected to climb because the magnitude of the crackdown has been masked by the blanket internet shutdown imposed by the authorities for more than a fortnight, rights groups say.

At 51,000 people have been arrested amid "the growing use of forced confessions," according to HRANA.

Trump's rhetoric in recent days, however, has focused on reining in the Iranian nuclear program and the US has moved a naval group led by aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln into the region.

Iran has repeatedly vowed it will hit back at US bases in the region if attacked. The new sanctions to curb Iran's oil exports come with Trump "committed to driving down the Iranian regime's illicit oil and petrochemical exports under the administration's maximum pressure campaign," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said in a statement.

When AI serves the underserved by bridging access gaps and linkage to health services

SHOBHA SHUKLA - CNS

If one assumes that artificial intelligence (AI) is for the 'haves' and not 'have-nots,' then let us dive deeper into how AI is helping reach the unreached populations with state-of-the-art public health services. Not just Global North, but several countries of the Global South too are shattering this stereotype of 'AI for the rich and mighty' by deploying AI to serve the most underserved communities and helping overcome access barriers. This becomes even more important when such person-centred AI tools comes from Global South innovators like DeepTek.

Before the largest TB and lung disease conference opens this year (Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease or APRC 2026), let us dive deeper in how AI has been deployed in the region as well as globally to serve the underserved.

Unless we prevent all TB infection, find all those with TB disease and link them to treatment, care and support pathway, the #endTB goal would remain elusive. When we miss TB cases, TB infection spreads, people suffer.

Finding TB early and accurately has been a formidable challenge till recently. Due to access barriers faced by those who are at higher TB risk as well as bad diagnostic tests like microscopy (which missed half or more of TB among those who took a TB test), we were (and are) failing to find all TB. Unless we find all TB, we cannot stop the spread of infection (because soon after initiation of right treatment, lung TB stops spreading) and reduce avoidable human suffering and untimely deaths.

Only 58 months left to end TB: Keep the promise!

In 2023 when all world leaders met at the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on TB, they promised to find at least 90% of all people with TB by 2027 and link them with standard services for treatment, care and support. Earlier, all world leaders had committed to deliver on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of the target is to end TB by 2030. But this is easier said than done.

One critical challenge is that we have to find people with TB disease when they have no symptoms. Several government-led surveys show that almost half of TB is among the asymptomatic and could only be detected with X-Rays. But access to radiology is limited and radiologists even more scarce. This is where AI-enabled TB detection comes as a saviour.

AI-enabled handheld and ultraportable X-Rays (battery operated) are increasingly being taken to the communities (even in far and remote areas) and screen everyone - regardless of TB symptoms.

Several countries in Asia and the Pacific region deploys AI to screen people who are at a higher risk of TB but least likely to access care. These include homeless people, migrant workers, people in prisons, among others. TB is the deadliest infectious disease globally.

AI turning point

In July 2021, WHO had integrated AI powered computer-aided detection software into its official guidelines for TB screening and diagnosis to help bridge the "missing millions" gap in detection. AI powered software can be used to interpret digital chest X-rays for TB screening.

This was historically the first time ever when AI powered computer-aided detection software was recommended for use in interpreting chest X-Rays for TB.

AI accuracy similar to that of human radiologists

Several studies show that AI-enabled computer-aided detection software can achieve highly sensitive TB detection in population-based screening and has accuracy on-par with human readers.

Generally speaking, AI became a substitute for a human expert reader in places where experts were not available (for example, a radiologist or trained medical officer) to detect abnormalities consistent with TB and avoid delays in the care pathway.

This was a big gamechanger because availability of human experts is often scarce in low- and middle-income countries. And it saves time of experts where AI can be of help. And who was getting benefitted the most? Underserved people.

India made a foundational shift following science and evidence

India, a country with highest TB burden globally, led from the front and made a foundational shift worldwide on 7th December 2024 by being the first country globally to screen everyone in high-risk settings for TB with artificial intelligence (AI) enabled handheld X-Rays and offer them upfront molecular test Truenat and linkage to appropriate treatment, care and support. Initially this drive was launched in almost half of districts in the country and later expanded nationwide (as per the concept note of government).

Within the first 100 days, India screened over 120 million people across the country in high-risk settings - most of them were screened with AI-enabled X-Rays.

In the first 100 days, Indian government's TB programme could find over 285,000 people who had no TB symptom (asymptomatic or sub-clinical TB) - thanks to AI. None of the TB asymptomatic people would have been found if AI-enabled X-Rays were not taken closer to the communities or at people's doorstep.

Real gamechanger was AI because within few seconds the AI generated report told the person whether he/ she or they had presumptive TB. Some AIs like that of DeepTek CXR AI (Genki) can scan a person within seconds for over 20 findings.

AI saves money and helps save lives

AI helped save and maximise financial resources because it was very cost effective and high impact public health intervention when it comes to finding all TB in high-risk settings. In an ideal world, everyone in high-risk settings (with or without TB symptoms) should get an upfront molecular test but this would be an extremely costly approach. AI helps screen people at much lower costs and those presumptive for TB are triaged for upfront molecular testing for confirmation of active TB disease, and linkage to care continuum.

The findings of the Indian government-led Health Technology Assessment of India Study published in 2025 further reinforce cost-effectiveness of using AI for finding more TB. This study compared AI tools with manual interpretation of chest X-Ray to assess cost-effective as well as sensitivity and specificity.

The study found that pooled sensitivity and specificity of AI tools met the criteria of WHO consolidated guidelines for TB screening – and not inferior to manual interpretation of chest X-Rays.

That is why this study strongly recommended AI enabled interpretation of chest X-Rays especially where resources are scarce.

DeepTek's AI making a difference worldwide

Recommended by the WHO for AI-powered TB detection, DeepTek's AI automatically analyses the chest X-Rays (CXR) for over 20 conditions of the chest. Along with Genki, DeepTek's Augmento offers a robust radiology AI platform.

"DeepTek's CXR AI- Genki, met the WHO performance standards in community-based and facility-based screening for TB of the lungs in people over 15 years of age," said Mohit Agarwal, Senior Director of DeepTek. Mohit is among the experts at APRC 2026 and Genki is being exhibited for all delegates. "DeepTek CXR AI is also compliant with The Global Fund Quality Assurance Policy," he said.

All public hospitals in Singapore deploying DeepTek's Radiology Solutions

Singapore government is adopting DeepTek's solutions at the national level across all public hospitals.

Several regulatory agencies globally have validated or approved DeepTek's CXR AI and at varying level of rollout. These regulators include US FDA and those of countries/ regions like European Union, , Thailand, Singapore, India (Indian Council of Medical Research - ICMR and Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation - CDSCO), Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Kenya, UK, South Africa among others.

"Currently DeepTek's solutions is deployed in more than 1000 hospitals and medical imaging centres (paying centres), and over 500 government-run public health screening sites globally, screening over 3 Million people across the globe," said Mohit Agarwal.

With Genki number of those detected with TB doubled

Underpinning the much-needed impact of Genki deployment on finding more people with TB, Mohit Agarwal said that over half a million people were screened for TB with Genki in Tamil Nadu, a state in southern India.

"Genki almost doubled the yield of TB patients, with 0.63% of people who were screened diagnosed with TB disease in districts of Tamil Nadu where Genki was deployed. This was compared with districts of the state without Genki where 0.36% of those verbally screened for TB symptoms were diagnosed with TB disease," said Mohit.

Cost of finding 1 person with TB disease halves with use of AI

"Cost of identifying one person with active TB disease is almost halved when Genki is used," said Mohit Agarwal. Cost to find 1 person with TB disease without AI was INR 106,342 (US$ 1,250) whereas the cost to find one person with TB with Genki AI reduced to INR 58,607 (US$ 688).

"More importantly we see an impact on quality of life because through the use of Genki, we are able to find patients who are sub-clinical or those who have no symptoms yet. So impact of medication is better and so is the impact on quality of life," added Mohit.

"One of the key learnings is that when the same AI product is used in different cohorts (for example, different X-Ray machines, age groups, ethnicities, genders or other such parameters) we have slightly different accuracies. For example, in different districts of Tamil Nadu we saw different accuracies of AI, however overall efficacy numbers (sensitivity and specificity numbers) remained fairly high around 92%," he said.

Responsible AI

"Responsible AI is one of the key innovations we have brought in, where while using this platform, we automatically compare the AI outcome with sputum results and radiology reviews. And we help you identify what is the efficacy of AI at your given setting and help you tune the AI to your specific setting," shared Mohit Agarwal.

With increasing deployment of AI enabled X-Rays and molecular tests in low- and middle-income countries, globally we were never so prepared ever before - for multi-disease point-of-care screening with AI and multi-disease point-of-care molecular testing using the same diagnostic infrastructure in the Global South. Let us hope all governments follow the science and evidence and help serve the underserved with equity and rights.

Shobha Shukla – CNS (Citizen News Service)

(Shobha Shukla is a feminist, health and development justice advocate, and an award-winning founding Managing Editor and Executive Director of CNS (Citizen News Service). She was also the Lead Discussant for SDG-3 at United Nations inter-governmental High Level Political Forum 2025. She is a former senior Physics faculty of prestigious Loreto Convent College; current President of Asia Pacific Regional Media Alliance for Health, Gender and Development Justice (APCAT Media); Chairperson of Global AMR Media Alliance (GAMA received the inter-ministerial AMR One Health Emerging Leaders and Outstanding Talents Award 2024); and Host of SHE & Rights (Sexual Health with Equity & Rights). Follow her on Twitter/X @shobha1shukla or read her writings here www.bit.ly/ShobhaShukla)

DeepTek CXR AI almost doubled the yield of TB patients and cost of finding 1 person with TB disease into half
Mohit Agarwal
Senior Director
DEEPTEK
APRC 2026
BANGKOK, THAILAND

SILCHAR SATURDAY, 07 FEBRUARY 2026
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North East Integration Rally
Peace | Progress | Prosperity
2026

NEIR ARTICLE

'8isOne'-Meghalaya Chapter of NEIR: A Festival Where the Northeast Met Itself

BISWADEEP GUPTA

The 8isOne–Meghalaya Chapter of North East Integration Rally was not just a cultural festival. It felt like a long conversation finally coming together. Held over two days at Mebaai Resort in Umtrew village of Ri Bhoi district, the event celebrated the shared spirit, stories, and struggles of the eight northeastern states of India.

Organised by the Mebaai Group and the North East Integration Rally, the festival brought artists, scholars, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and cultural lovers under one roof. People came from different corners of the Northeast, carrying their own languages, clothes, songs, and food. Yet, the feeling was one of closeness. Different, but deeply connected.

From the moment the festival began, the venue came alive. Bright traditional attire filled the space. Music echoed through the hills. Dances from different communities flowed one after another. The colours, sounds, and smiles created an atmosphere that felt warm and proud. It was a reminder that the Northeast is many worlds, yet one region.

The festival was built around dialogue as much as celebration. Alongside performances, there were thoughtful discussions and interactive networking sessions. These spaces allowed people to speak, listen, and reflect. Many conversations focused on building cultural bridges and shaping shared narratives for the region.

Participants spoke about the need to protect indigenous traditions at a time of fast change. Urban growth, migration, and global media are reshaping daily life. In this process, many local practices, oral histories, and art forms are slowly fading. The festival became a place to talk about these concerns openly.

A key moment of the event was the panel discussion titled "Cultural Integration through Art, Music, Literature and Food in Meghalaya and Northeast India." The session was moderated by Ibankyntiew Mawrie, Editor of 4Front Media. It brought together voices from art, academia, music, and community work.

The panel featured Raphael Warjri, a noted artist and filmmaker; Auswyn Winter Japang, Assistant Professor at St. Anthony's College, Shillong; Hammarsing Kharhmar, musician and founder of Da Minot Band; Alethea Lyngdoh, Communication Head at NESFAS; and Prasenjit Biswas, Professor of Philosophy at North-Eastern Hill University.

The discussion moved deep and honest. Panellists stressed the urgent need to document and protect traditional knowledge systems. They spoke about oral histories, indigenous art, food practices, and community wisdom that have survived for generations. Much of this knowledge, they said, still lives only in memory and everyday practice. Without proper records, it remains fragile.

Speakers pointed out that culture is not just performance. It is also food cooked at home, stories told by elders, and skills learned by watching and doing. When these are lost, a part of identity is lost too.

At the same time, the panel did not argue against change. Instead, they spoke about adapting tradition to modern tools. Digital platforms, social media, filmmaking, and online archives were seen as powerful allies. These tools can help indigenous voices reach wider audiences, especially young people who now live online.

Youth came up again and again in the discussion. Panellists described young people as both keepers of tradition and creators of new paths. They encouraged students, artists, and content creators to take active roles in documenting their communities. From short videos to music experiments and digital storytelling, new forms can keep old knowledge alive.

The discussion also highlighted the need for collaboration. Artists, academics, community groups, and policymakers must work together. Cultural preservation cannot happen in isolation. Strong networks are needed to support sustainable cultural growth across the Northeast.

KRC FOUNDATION

ACTIVITY PROGRAM

BARAK FESTIVAL
JANUARY 10-12, 2025

12 JAN
NE Cultural Fest
Any form of Art and Cultural showcase can be a part of the fest.
The Top performances will be invited to perform in the Main Fest.
School, College, University Department, Individual, & Group can participate.

11 JAN
Adventure Sports
Trekking & Camps, Obstacle Negotiations, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Techniques, Water Sports can equip youths with skills to face the challenges in life, increase confidence and sense of purpose in one's life and stay connected with nature.

NE CULTURAL Fest

North East India
Adventure Sports
Trekking | Obstacle Negotiation | Sport Climbing | Disaster Management Technique | Water Sports

Barak Festival
2025
BARAK VALLEY CONCLAVE
Theme: POTENTIAL, ISSUES & CHALLENGES
SILCHAR
REGISTER NOW

11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
Potential, Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed with key stakeholders.
Individuals, NGOs, and Organisations can register for talks, policy frameworks, events, investment, and promotional proposals. Participation is through invitation only. All themed events are hosted here.

10 Jan
Barak Festival: Peace Progress & Prosperity

Barak Festival
Adventure Sports, Art & Culture Promotion

KRC TIMES
BROADCAST PARTNER
REGISTER HERE

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

12 JAN
River-Climate Conclave
Stakeholders will deliberate on Climate Change, pollution and river cleaning. The conclave will focus on the importance, relevance and protection of River Barak. Painting & photography competition and exhibition River Barak, Climate Change.

River-Climate Conclave
Climate Change, Pollution & River Cleaning

Media Conclave

10 JAN
Media Conclave
Media Conclave, Media Awards, Workshops, Welfare Fund, Talks and Contest are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for all, all for One'.
Workshops for Media students, journalists, interns & corporate houses, agencies, guest, speakers, awardees.

5E CONCLAVE 'From School to Campus to Corporate'

11 JAN
5E For Success Conclave
The 5E for success conclave is going to deliberate on the theme: 'From School to Campus to Corporate'.
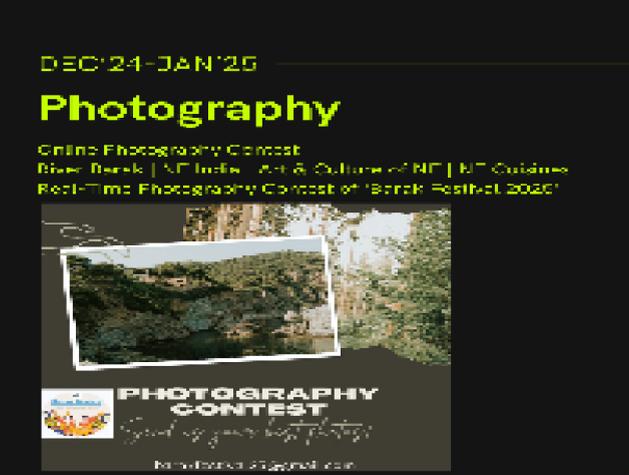Schools, Educational Institutions and corporate houses can join the Conclave as Sponsors.
Quiz and Group Discussion for Barak Valley Schools & College, Extempore (School) /Public Speaking (College).
In an online event where students of NE India, School's and Colleges can participate.

BARAK FESTIVAL 2025
PAINTING CARNIVAL
NE CULTURAL FEST
E-SPORTS
FILM FESTIVAL | EXHIBITION

10-12 JAN
Science Studio
Get a glimpse of Science for kids from Jigyasa!
Class VI-XII Teachers | School Administrators Parents
Raw science out of textbooks into real-life experiences of students.

10-12 JAN
E-Sports
Registration Certificates | CASH PRIZES | Trophy

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

PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST
Send us your best photos

11 JAN
film festival
Award-Catching Documentary Film from Manipur
Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, WB
Media Talk | Registrations | Meet filmmaker

Watch Out!
film festival

Barak Festival
Band Night 10 JAN
Musical Night 11 JAN

BARAK FESTIVAL PRESENTS
E-SPORTS TOURNAMENT
FREE FIRE

10-12 JAN
Book Bank
Book Club
Meet Authors, Publishers, Read & Discuss, Buy and Sell Books
Painting Carnival

5E SUCCESS
STUDENT INTERNSHIP
Discover valuable experience and learn more about the industry.

POSITIONS
• Outreach Executive
• Event Management
• Programme Coordinator

APPLY NOW