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PERSPECTIVE

"The future belongs to those who learn more skills and combine them in creative ways." ~ Robert Greene

Manipur CM Appoints Oinam Sunil Singh, Lt Gen (Retd) L Nishikanta Singh as Advisors

IMPHAL

The Manipur government has appointed Oinam Sunil Singh and Lt Gen (Retd) L Nishikanta Singh as Advisors to Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh.

According to an official order issued by the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, the appointments were approved during a Cabinet meeting held on February 17. Both individuals have been appointed as Advisors to the Chief Minister for a period of one year with immediate effect, in public interest.

Oinam Sunil Singh is a senior journalist and former State Information Commissioner, with extensive experience in public affairs, governance and media administration. Lt Gen (Retd) L Nishikanta Singh is a retired senior Army officer with a distinguished service record spanning several decades.

The notification stated that the appointments are intended to strengthen the advisory framework of the Chief Minister's Office and provide strategic inputs on governance and administrative matters.

Further details regarding the specific portfolios or responsibilities assigned to the newly appointed Advisors are yet to be made public.

WHO SAID WHAT

Deeply saddened by the passing of Shri Mani Shankar Mukhopadhyay Ji, fondly known as Shankar. He was a towering figure in Bengali literature whose words portrayed the lives of people with sensitivity and insight. Through his unforgettable works, he impacted generations of readers and enriched India's literary world. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and countless admirers. Om Shanti.
~ Narendra Modi, PM

700 CRPF Jawans Laid Down Lives for Peace in Northeast: Shah

SHAH LINKS KOCHUTULI EVICTION DRIVE TO SECURITY BOOST AS 10TH ASSAM POLICE BATTALION CAMPUS LAUNCHED IN SONAPUR

GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday paid tribute to personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) who lost their lives in the line of duty in the Northeast, stating that nearly 700 jawans of the force have made the ultimate sacrifice to restore peace and stability in the region.

Addressing the 87th Raising Day celebrations of the CRPF at the Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex in Guwahati, Shah said that Assam alone witnessed the loss of 79 security personnel during years of insurgency and unrest.

"The peace and normalcy that people of Assam and the Northeast are experiencing today have come at a heavy cost. Nearly 700 CRPF jawans laid down their lives for peace in the Northeast. Without these sacrifices, it would not have been possible to restore law and order," he said.

Shah recalled that a decade ago, the Northeast, along with Jammu and Kashmir and Maoist-affected areas,



posed serious internal security challenges. "Ten to twelve years ago, the region frequently witnessed bandhs, blockades, bomb blasts and violence. Today, there is a visible atmosphere of peace and stability," he said, attributing the transformation to sustained security operations and coordinated efforts between the Centre and the states.

The Home Minister noted that the improved security environment has paved the way for accelerated development, connectivity and investment across the Northeast. He highlighted the signing of several peace accords with insurgent groups and enhanced

coordination among security agencies as key factors in reducing violence.

During the ceremonial parade, eight CRPF contingents - including the Rapid Action Force (RAF), women personnel and CoBRA units - took part in the celebrations. Fourteen personnel were awarded police medals for gallantry, while five received the President's Medal for distinguished service. Five battalions were also honoured for outstanding performance.

Shah traced the growth of the CRPF from its inception in 1939 with just two battalions to its present strength of 248 battalions and over 3.25 lakh personnel. He lauded the force's role in safeguarding the unity and integrity of the country, particularly in sensitive regions such as the Northeast.

Recalling historic acts of bravery, Shah referred to the events of October 21, 1959, at Hot Springs in Ladakh, when CRPF personnel faced a surprise Chinese attack. The sacrifice of ten jawans is commemorated annually as Police Commemoration Day. He

also mentioned CRPF Valour Day, observed on April 9, marking the 1965 Battle of Sardar Post in the Rann of Kutch, where two CRPF companies repulsed a Pakistani brigade despite losing six personnel.

Reiterating the Centre's commitment to sustaining peace in the Northeast, Shah said the government would continue to support security forces and strengthen coordination with state administrations. Shah, who is on a two-day visit to Assam, was the chief guest at the parade. Since December 29, this marks his third visit to poll-bound Assam, where the BJP is seeking to retain power for a third consecutive term.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday laid the foundation stone of the 10th Assam Police Battalion campus at Kochutuli in Sonapur, linking the State's ongoing eviction drives to a broader push for strengthening internal security in Assam and the Northeast.

Addressing a public gathering at the site, Shah described the project as

a significant step towards reinforcing the region's security architecture. The campus, estimated to cost around Rs 270 crore, is being developed over 174 bighas of land that was previously under encroachment. "Today is an important day for both Assam and the nation's security. I am happy that the land, which was once under encroachment and raised security concerns, has been freed and is now being used for strengthening law enforcement. This project reflects our commitment to ensuring safety and stability in the region," Shah said.

The Union Home Minister underlined that improved infrastructure for police forces was central to the Centre's strategy of enhancing operational efficiency and response capability in sensitive and border States. He also reiterated the importance accorded to the Northeast under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, noting that the Prime Minister's frequent visits to the region signal its growing prominence in national policy.

Manipur CM Meets Governor; Cabinet Expansion Likely on February 23



IMPHAL

Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Friday evening called on Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at Lok Bhavan, marking his first official meeting with the Governor since assuming office earlier this month.

According to an official communiqué, the meeting focused on strengthening initiatives aimed at the welfare and holistic development of the state. Sources close to the Chief Minister said discussions also covered the likely induction of new members into the Council of Ministers and the allocation of portfolios.

Khemchand is expected to travel to New Delhi within the next few days to hold consultations with central leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

The Chief Minister will be accompanied by Deputy Chief Ministers Losii Dikho and Nemcha Kip-

gen during the visit to the national capital.

Sources indicated that after Khemchand's return from New Delhi, the remaining seven vacant ministerial berths are likely to be filled on February 23. The allocation of portfolios to both newly inducted and existing ministers may also be finalised on the same day.

Notably, Khemchand, MLA from Singjamei Assembly Constituency, was sworn in as Chief Minister on February 4, along with Losii Dikho (Mao AC) and Nemcha Kipgen (Kangpokpi AC) as Deputy Chief Ministers. On the same day, Govindas Konthoujam (Bishnupur AC) and Khurajam Loken (Wangui AC) took oath as Cabinet Ministers.

With five ministers currently in office, seven positions remain vacant, as the state's Council of Ministers is mandated to have a total strength of 12. Portfolios for the ministers sworn in earlier this month are yet to be allocated.

Manipur Violence Victim and BJP MLA Vungzagin Valte Passes Away

IMPHAL

Vungzagin Valte, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA from Manipur and a victim of the 2023 ethnic violence in the state, passed away on Friday evening after battling critical injuries for nearly two years. He was undergoing treatment at Medanta Medicity Hospital in Gurugram at the time of his death.

Valte, a Kuki-Zo legislator representing the Thanlon Assembly Constituency in Churachandpur district, was brutally assaulted on May 4, 2023, a day after large-scale ethnic clashes erupted between Meitei and Kuki communities across Manipur.

On the day of the attack, Valte had met then Chief Minister N. Biren Singh in Imphal to appeal for peace amid spiralling tensions. While returning from the meeting, his vehicle was intercepted by a mob near RIMS Road at Nagamapal in Imphal West district. He was dragged out of the vehicle and severely beaten. The assault left one side of his face crushed and caused extensive damage to his left eye.

Following the attack, Valte was airlifted to New Delhi for advanced medical care and remained bedridden for an extended period. Over the next two years, he underwent prolonged treatment at multiple hospitals in the national capital as well as in Churachandpur.

In April 2025, he returned to Churachandpur and continued medical treatment as part of his long recovery process. However, his health deteriorated earlier this month, prompting his transfer once again for specialised care. On February 8, 2026, he was airlifted to Gurugram and admitted to Medanta Medicity Hospital.

The current Manipur Chief Minister, Yumnam Khemchand Singh, personally monitored Valte's health condition and facilitated the air ambulance arrangement. He also saw the ailing legislator off at the airport, describing the gesture as one of solidarity and a call for peace.

Despite sustained medical efforts, Valte succumbed to his injuries on February 20.

Mizoram Border Districts Review Trade Protocols, Tighten FMR Enforcement Along Indo-Myanmar Border



AIZAWL

Senior civil and police officials from Mizoram's southern border districts convened a high-level virtual meeting on Thursday to deliberate on regulating cross-border trade and strengthening enforcement of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Indo-Myanmar border amid rising security concerns.

According to an official statement, top district administration officials from Lawngtlai district and Siaha district - both of which share an international boundary with Myanmar - participated in the consultation and resolved to intensify enforcement measures in vulnerable border areas.

The district magistrates of the two adjoining districts underscored the need for stricter implementation of the FMR and other relevant laws to maintain law and order. The Free Movement Regime permits limited cross-border

movement for residents living along the frontier, but authorities have expressed concerns over its misuse in recent months.

During the deliberations, officials agreed to review the existing Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) governing border movement and trade. A comprehensive study of the current framework will be undertaken with the aim of drafting a joint SOP to be implemented uniformly by both district administrations.

The proposed joint framework will subsequently be submitted to the Mizoram government for approval.

Officials also decided to conduct surprise inspections to detect illegal or undocumented immigrants in both districts. The meeting emphasised close coordination between civil authorities and law enforcement agencies to ensure that cross-border trade and movement remain within the legal framework.

The Indo-Myanmar border in Mizoram spans several remote and sensitive stretches, including areas near Champhai district, and has witnessed heightened vigilance in recent years owing to regional instability.

Participants resolved to convene another joint consultation at the earliest to assess progress and review the effectiveness of the enhanced enforcement measures.

Hindi, Regional Languages 'Sisters, Not Rivals': Amit Shah at Rajbhasha Sammelan in Tripura

AGARTALA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday asserted that Hindi and regional languages are "sisters born of the same mother" and not competitors, maintaining that the promotion of Hindi strengthens rather than undermines India's rich linguistic diversity.

Addressing the Rajbhasha Sammelan in Agartala, Shah rejected what he described as a long-standing "false narrative" that Hindi was being imposed on non-Hindi-speaking populations. He said the misconception had been effectively dismantled over the past decade.

"There can be no dispute between Hindi and other local languages. They are sisters born of the same mother and have grown together," he said, adding that neither language nor script should ever become a cause of conflict.

Shah emphasised that language should function as a vehicle



for development and national integration, not division. He urged policymakers, scholars and administrators to work proactively towards the advancement of both official and regional

languages, underscoring their importance in governance and nation-building.

The Home Minister appealed to families to speak to their children in their mother tongue at

home, warning that neglecting native languages would deprive future generations of access to their literature, traditions and cultural values.

"Using our mother tongue at home is essential for preserving cultural identity," he said, stressing that linguistic heritage forms the foundation of civilisational continuity.

Addressing representatives from the Eastern, North Eastern and Northern regions, Shah said the preservation of indigenous languages must be prioritised, particularly in the North East.

In a key intervention, Shah urged North Eastern states, including Tripura, to consider preserving their indigenous languages through the Nagari script. He argued that script plays a crucial role in language conservation and standardisation.

"Indigenous languages cannot be safeguarded through foreign scripts," he said, adding that efforts to preserve such languages

would be more effective and enduring if carried out in Nagari.

Shah noted that several North Eastern states had already taken steps in this direction and called upon Tripura to arrive at a "clear and unambiguous decision" on the matter.

He further observed that more than 2,000 languages across India - especially those without their own scripts - could potentially be preserved through Nagari. The script, he said, can aid in documentation, institutional development and broader dissemination of such languages.

Highlighting what he described as a broader transformation of the North East under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shah said the region had moved from an era of vivad (dispute) to vikas (development).

Since 2014, he said, 21 peace accords have been signed with insurgent groups, and nearly 11,000 "misguided youths" have

returned to the mainstream, leading to significant improvements in peace and stability.

He credited sustained efforts by the Centre and state governments for the improved security environment and development momentum in the region.

The conference was attended by Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, Members of Parliament Biplab Kumar Deb and Rajib Bhattacharjee, along with representatives from multiple states.

Reiterating that decades of "propaganda" had created unnecessary apprehensions about Hindi, Shah maintained that the growth of Hindi does not threaten regional languages. Instead, he said, it can help expand their reach and foster mutual enrichment.

"Language must be a bridge, not a barrier," the Home Minister said, urging a balanced approach that promotes Hindi while safeguarding India's diverse linguistic heritage.



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WHEN GEOPOLITICS ENTERS THE KITCHEN

On an ordinary evening in an Indian home, geopolitics arrives quietly through routine expenses. A UPI message confirms the school fee payment. The grocery bill is a little heavier than last week. The LPG cylinder booking is due. Petrol has pinched again. Someone mentions that gold is rising; someone else shares that export orders are slowing and imported parts are getting costlier or delayed. No one is trying to discuss foreign policy, yet foreign policy has already entered the household budget.

That is the defining change of our times: diplomacy is no longer distant. A disturbance in a faraway region can raise shipping costs, push up energy prices, shake currencies, and land at our doorstep as inflation. What once looked like a chessboard for states now behaves like weather. Global, fast-moving, and unavoidable.

The world order is shifting, and the effects are now felt by the common man. For decades after the Cold War, many believed that growing trade and interdependence would steadily reduce conflict. It was the liberal assumption that commerce creates habits of cooperation. But the present moment is reminding us of what Realism has always argued: states worry about power and security first, and economic ties do not automatically erase strategic mistrust. When one country strengthens itself, others feel less secure and respond. This is the "security dilemma," and it explains why tensions can rise even without anyone openly wanting war.

Once tensions rise, the economy follows. Trade routes become risky, insurance costs climb, shipping slows, and energy becomes unpredictable. Economists call these "supply shocks." For a household, it simply means the same essentials now cost more. Even when local demand has not surged, prices can rise because costs are travelling into the economy from outside like fuel, fertiliser, logistics, imported inputs, and even global sentiment.

This is also why nations are redesigning supply chains. Earlier, the guiding principle was efficiency which was cheapest and fastest. Now, the priority is resilience which is reliable and secure. In policy language, countries are "de-risking" and sometimes "friend-shoring," shifting production and sourcing toward trusted partners. In daily life, the consequence is visible in delayed deliveries, costlier components, and businesses becoming cautious. A factory owner holds inventory. A trader reduces inventory. A young couple postpones a home loan. These are not dramatic events, but together they shape national momentum.

Security itself has economic consequences. When threats rise, defence spending rises. That spending is essential, but it is never free. Every rupee has an opportunity cost: money spent on one priority cannot be spent elsewhere. Governments must raise resources through taxes, borrowing, or tighter budgeting. Economists warn that excessive borrowing can "crowd out" private investment by pushing up interest rates or absorbing available capital. So the citizen can feel the impact twice. First in market prices and then in a tighter financial environment.

Currency movements add another layer. Capital dislikes uncertainty and often moves quickly toward perceived safety. If the rupee weakens in such periods, imported essentials become costlier. This is "exchange rate pass-through" where the fall in currency value shows up as higher prices for fuel, machinery, chemicals, and many other inputs. Eventually it reaches the common man as inflation, because businesses must pass higher costs forward to survive.

Gold rising in uncertain times is another familiar signal. In economics this is "flight to safety." Families instinctively hedge: they hold back discretionary spending, avoid risk, and prefer assets that feel secure. Individually, this is sensible. Collectively, it can slow consumption and investment, especially if uncertainty persists.

Jobs, too, are deeply exposed to geopolitics. A factory hires on orders, not speeches. When export markets soften, or when tariffs and logistics costs squeeze margins, hiring slows. Trade wars strike at a classic idea of the comparative advantage. In principle, countries specialise and everyone gains through trade. But when trade becomes weaponised and tariffs rise, those gains shrink and uncertainty expands. In India, this can translate into fewer new hires, cautious wage growth, and delayed projects, especially in sectors tied to global demand.

So where does India go from here? First, we must accept that national power today is layered: military, economic, technological, and diplomatic that too often all at once. The biggest vulnerability is not disagreement; it is dependence. When a nation depends too heavily on a single source for energy, critical technology, finance, or strategic materials, it becomes easier to pressure. This is why strategic autonomy matters not as a slogan, but as a practical survival approach. It means building diversified partnerships and preserving options.

Second, India must understand the balance-of-power logic without being trapped by it. Balance of power is not merely about rivalry; it is about preventing coercion. When a country has alternatives like multiple partners, multiple routes, domestic capacity and credible defences it becomes harder to corner. Deterrence, in the modern sense, is not only military. It is also economic and technological: the ability to withstand pressure without panic.

Third, economic stability must be treated as national security. Foreign exchange reserves, fiscal discipline, and stable inflation are not just economic terms; they are shields. In an open economy, capital flows can react faster than policy. Frameworks like Mundell-Fleming (which explains how interest rates, exchange rates, and capital movement interact) remind us that credibility and stability reduce shocks. A country that manages its deficits prudently and builds buffers faces smaller tremors when the global environment turns rough.

Fourth, resilience must be built at home. That means diversifying energy sources, strengthening logistics, investing in storage and transport, and creating robust supply chains for critical items. It also means building manufacturing ecosystems that can scale when imports become uncertain. This is where "self-reliance" should be understood correctly: not isolation, but capability. Not closing doors, but having strength behind the door.

Our ancient thought fits this moment. Kautilya wrote with clarity because statecraft demanded realism. Thucydides observed how fear and insecurity can shape rivalry even when prosperity exists. Across civilisations, the lesson is consistent: values matter, but capability protects values. Prosperity and security are twins. Strength protects prosperity; prosperity funds strength.

If the central character of this story is the common man, policy should be judged by one simple test: does it increase India's options in a crisis, or reduce them? Increasing options protects citizens. Reducing them exposes them.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Communication is not about saying what we think. Communication is about ensuring others hear what we mean.

- Simon Sinek

Bangladesh's power shift: What next?



PUSHP SARAF

There has been a dramatic reversal of fortunes in Bangladesh. After 17 years in exile, Tarique Rahman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was sworn in as Prime Minister on February 17. Sheikh Hasina, the country's longest-serving Prime Minister (1996-2001 and 2009-2024), has been in exile since August 5, 2024.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI), once severely weakened by war crimes convictions that led to the execution of several senior leaders, has re-emerged as a significant parliamentary force following the February 12 Jatiya Sangsad elections.

The fledgling National Citizen Party (NCP), formed by youth leaders whose agitation precipitated Hasina's removal from office and departure from the country, has yet to develop a strong organisational base. Contesting as an ally of the BJI, it won six of the 30 seats it contested as part of an 11-party alliance – a result that fell well short of expectation.

The overall picture that emerges is that in power politics, no one can be written off permanently. There may be reverses, exile – self-imposed or enforced – and persecution. These are prices leaders and their parties often pay for chal-



lenging what they perceive as authoritarian authority. Possibly, such suffering becomes the basis for a gradual accretion of strength; emotional appeal grows as the silent majority develops sympathy for adversity, choosing to speak only when an opportunity arises. Yet few such leaders and parties seem to learn from their own experiences. Once in power, they often resort to the same ruthless tactics of which they themselves were victims. Little do they realise that, as in their own case, the tables can turn at any time.

Therefore, those rejoicing at the present discomfiture of Sheikh Hasina and her party,

the Awami League (AL), would do well to exercise caution. They may be down, but they are far from out – even if their name has been removed from ballot papers. The very fact that rivals repeatedly invoked Hasina and the AL during the election campaign is itself a measure of their enduring political weight. They were denounced as "fascist" and worse, but such rhetoric only underscored their continued relevance in the national imagination.

After more than a decade and a half of uninterrupted governance, the AL remains deeply embedded in Bangladesh's political landscape. Its historical pedigree as the party of the Liberation War continues to confer symbolic capital. The AL draws upon the legacy of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of independence and the Father of the Nation. The vandalism and destruction of symbols associated with Sheikh Mujib, including his ancestral home, during the recent student agitation do not diminish his central place in the country's Liberation War narrative. Historical memory, once institutionalised, is not easily erased.

It is no secret that both BJI and the NCP are politically opposed to Hasina and the AL. The BNP, too, has little sympathy for Hasina. Yet the BNP has,

Shafiqur Rahman and NCP convener Nahid Islam. The Jamaat leader responded warmly, congratulating him in advance as the "future Prime Minister" and describing the meeting as "a historic moment for our national politics."

It was, indeed, a noteworthy gesture in a country long habituated to adversarial politics. Despite securing a commanding majority, Tarique chose to reach out to leaders beyond his own camp. The BNP won 209 seats on its own, compared with 68 for the BJI and six for the NCP. Allies of the BNP and the BJI secured three and nine seats respectively, out of the 297 constituencies for which results were declared from the 299 contested. A court barred publication of results in two constituencies, while polling in one was postponed. The remaining seats were claimed by independents and smaller parties. The Jatiya Sangsad, has a total strength of 350 members, including 50 seats reserved for women and allocated to parties on the basis of proportional representation.

Yet it would be premature to interpret Tarique's outreach as evidence of lasting bonhomie. The BNP and the BJI have historically maintained a fraught, transactional relationship – cooperative at times, deeply mistrustful at others. They were allies in 2001, but both later found themselves politically marginalised during Hasina's prolonged tenure. During the recent campaign, the BNP did not hesitate to remind voters of the BJI's controversial role during the 1971 Liberation War, a pointed signal that electoral arithmetic does not erase historical fault lines.

The NCP, for its part, remains sceptical of the BNP's intentions toward Hasina and the AL, particularly given the BNP's publicly stated opposition to banning political parties. During the campaign, NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain alleged that a BNP government would be reluctant to pursue accountability for the killings associated with the 2024 mass uprising. He further claimed that the BNP would allow Hasina's children to re-enter politics, arguing that by granting Hasina political space in the past, Tarique's father – BNP founder and former President Ziaur Rahman – had committed a "historic mistake".

That decision, he said, had cost Bangladesh dearly, adding that even Khaleda Zia (Tarique's mother and former Prime Minister) had ultimately paid a heavy political price. In a particularly stark formulation, Asif asserted that "at this point, BNP coming to power and Awami League coming to power

mean the same thing," alleging that the BNP had already reached an implicit understanding with its old adversary.

Ironically, even as it questions the intentions of others, the NCP has faced internal turbulence of its own. At least 19 of its leaders resigned in protest against the party's electoral alliance with the BJI – a reminder that in Bangladesh's shifting political terrain, ideological boundaries remain contested and alliances inherently unstable.

The BNP may not face an immediate threat from these de-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

I am profoundly saddened and deeply grieved by the untimely demise of Pu Vungzagin Vaite, Hon'ble MLA of Thanlon Assembly Constituency, who passed away today in New Delhi while under intensive medical care.

Pu Vaite was not only a dedicated public representative but also a compassionate leader who devoted his entire life to the service of the people. His unwavering commitment to the welfare, progress, and holistic development of Manipur reflected his true spirit of selfless service. He worked tirelessly to strengthen infrastructure, uplift communities, and bring meaningful change to the lives of countless people, earning the respect, trust, and affection of all.

His passing is an immense loss not only to his family and loved ones but also to the people of Thanlon and the entire state of Manipur. We have lost a sincere leader, a humble human being, and a pillar of strength who always stood for the welfare of his people.

In this moment of profound sorrow, I extend my heartfelt condolences to his bereaved family, relatives, supporters, and well-wishers. My thoughts and prayers are with them during this difficult time. May the Almighty grant them strength, comfort, and courage to bear this irreparable loss.

May his noble soul rest in eternal peace.

~ Yumnam Khemchand, CM, Manipur



velopments, but it would be unwise to dismiss them. Both the BJI and the NCP have shown a propensity for strident public positioning and could yet challenge the government on contentious questions of accountability, legitimacy and political space. More than anyone else, Tarique's own long years in exile should remind him how swiftly fortunes can reverse in Bangladesh's unforgiving political arena.

Hasina and the AL remain consequential actors, capable of mobilising memory, organisation and grievance. The BNP's sweeping victory, decisive though it is, has unfolded in the conspicuous absence of its principal and historic rival.

A mandate secured without that contest carries its own ambiguities.

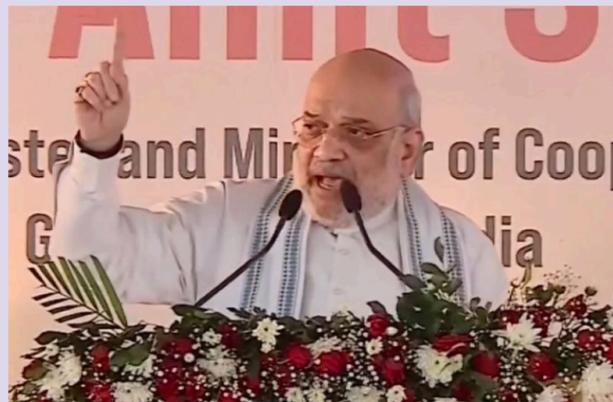
How long can political space remain closed to Hasina and the AL? And does this moment signal the return of stability – or merely a pause in Bangladesh's recurring cycle of confrontation and upheaval?

Amit Shah Pledges Flood-Free Assam in Five Years, Launches VVP-II from Cachar

SILCHAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would make Assam flood-free within the next five years, as he launched the second phase of the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP-II) from Cachar district and reviewed border security arrangements along the India-Bangladesh boundary.

Commencing his two-day visit to the poll-bound state, Shah inaugurated the nationwide scheme at Nathampur village and inspected a stretch of the international border. He said development of border villages remained a



key priority of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asserting that improved infrastructure in frontier areas would help curb migration and prevent infiltration.

Highlighting the BJP's development agenda, Shah said steps had already been initiated to address Assam's recurring floods and expressed confidence that the state would be made flood-free within five years. He also pointed to infrastructure expansion over the past decade, noting that more than 24,000 kilometres of roads had been upgraded and several bridges constructed under what he described as the "double-engine" gov-

ernment. Under VVP-II, 1,954 villages across 334 blocks in 17 states bordering Pakistan and Bangladesh will be covered. In Assam, 140 villages in 26 blocks across nine districts have been included under the ₹6,900-crore nationwide scheme.

Targeting the opposition, Shah alleged that the Congress had failed to secure the country's borders during its tenure, leading to infiltration in Assam, and had neglected development in border regions. He claimed that the BJP government, led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, had effectively addressed infiltration, violence and in-

surgency in the state.

Following the launch event, Shah reviewed security arrangements along the international boundary, visited a Border Security Force (BSF) camp, paid tribute at a martyrs' memorial and planted a banyan tree near the border.

Shah later departed for Agartala. On Saturday, he is scheduled to attend the CRPF annual day parade in Guwahati and lay the foundation stone for the new campus of the 10th Assam Police Battalion at Sonapur.

Assembly elections to the 126-member Assam Legislative Assembly are likely to be held in March-April.

Bodo People's Front Not Keen on Rajya Sabha Polls, Says Hagrama Mohilary

GUWAHATI

The Bodoland People's Front (BPF) has signalled that it is not strongly inclined to contest the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections, even as three seats from Assam are scheduled to fall vacant in March.

Speaking to reporters in Kokrajhar on Friday, BPF president and Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary said the party, despite being a constituent of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), is not seriously focused on the Rajya Sabha polls at this stage.

"We are not serious about the Rajya Sabha elections. Three seats will become vacant, and we will hold discussions. If we are given an opportunity, it will be welcome," Mohilary said. He also indicated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Kokrajhar, the capital of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), in the first week of March. During the visit, Modi is expected to lay the foundation stone for a proposed railway line connecting Kokrajhar in India to Gelephu in Bhutan, a project aimed at strengthening cross-border connectivity and boosting trade and regional development. Meanwhile, sources within the NDA suggested that discussions are underway over seat-sharing arrangements for the Rajya Sabha elections. Of the three seats, one is likely to be allocated to the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), with party chief and former BTR CEM Pramod Boro emerging as a probable candidate. The remaining two seats are expected to go to the BJP.

The developments underscore heightened political activity within the NDA in Assam as parties assess their strategies and representation ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls.

Let Himanta Speak on Next 5-Year Plan, Not 10-Year-Old Issue: Priyanka Gandhi

GUWAHATI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi criticised Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, saying he should focus on jobs, development and his roadmap for the next five years instead of revisiting what she termed a "10-year-old" controversy about his alleged chance of becoming a Congress chief minister.

Addressing reporters, Gandhi dismissed Sarma's recent claims that he was once on the verge of being sworn in as Assam's Congress chief minister in 2014.

"There are many decisions taken in politics. Some go in favour, some against. We have to bear with it. What would I say if he is still crying over the 10-year-old issue," she remarked. Earlier this week, Sarma had alleged that then Congress president Sonia Gandhi had asked him to decide the date for his swearing-in after 58 MLAs extended support to him in 2014. He further claimed that the situation changed after Rahul Gandhi, who was in the United States at the time, made calls to party leaders.

The Congress in Assam had witnessed internal dissidence following the 2011 Assembly elections, with a section of legislators backing Sarma as chief minister in place of the incumbent, Tarun Gogoi. Sarma eventually resigned from the Congress in 2015 and joined the BJP, later playing a pivotal role in the party's first Assembly election victory in Assam in 2016.

Gandhi said the chief minister should instead concentrate on governance and address pressing public concerns.

"Let him speak about Assam's development. Let him tell the people what he has done and what he plans to do in the next five years. The youth want to know," she said.

She also levelled allegations of corruption against the state government, accusing it of concentrating wealth in "one family" and handing over the state's assets to major industrial houses.

"People can see how Assam's assets are being handed over. These belong to the people of Assam. The land being given away is public property," she claimed.

BJP Manipur Accuses Youth Congress of 'Indecent Theatrics' at AI Summit, Says Protest Aimed at Damaging India's Global Standing

IMPHAL

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Manipur Pradesh unit, on Thursday strongly criticised a protest staged by workers of the Indian Youth Congress during a high-profile Artificial Intelligence (AI) summit, terming it an attempt to tarnish India's image before the international community.

Addressing the media, BJP Manipur spokesperson M. Asnikumar Singh alleged that the demonstration during the summit amounted to "indecent theatrics" at a time when India was hosting delegates, policymakers and technology leaders from across the globe.

"This summit is a moment of immense national pride. With participation from over 100 countries and the presence of globally respected technology leaders, India is showcasing its extraordinary innovation, talent and leadership in



Artificial Intelligence," Singh said. "The world is engaging with India as a leading economic and intellectual powerhouse, shaping conversations on the future of technology

and governance. Protesting during such a major event is shameful."

Singh contended that the protest sent a negative message internationally and undermined the sig-

nificance of the global platform. He further alleged that the Congress party's actions reflected an inability to acknowledge India's growing stature in emerging technologies.

Without elaborating on the specific demands raised by the Youth Congress protesters, the BJP leader described the agitation as an act of political desperation rather than constructive opposition. He maintained that events of strategic and international importance should be insulated from partisan politics.

Referring to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Singh alleged that the party appeared more focused on provocation than substantive policy engagement.

The BJP reiterated that national interest must take precedence during international events and called upon opposition parties to exercise restraint in matters that, it said, concern India's global credibility and diplomatic engagement.

Manipur CM Reviews IDP Rehabilitation, Releases Rs 33 Crore via DBT

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Thursday chaired a high-level review meeting at the Secretariat to assess the progress and future roadmap of rehabilitation efforts for internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the state's ethnic violence. The review followed a virtual interaction in which the Chief Minister heard grievances raised by Kuki Zo MLAs regarding resettlement, pensions, education and healthcare in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts. Later, at a programme in Imphal West for the distribution of benefits to IDPs through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Singh announced the release of approximately Rs 33 crore to support displaced families. In a post on X, the Chief Minister said he held detailed deliberations with senior officials on strengthening rehabilitation meas-



ures in key sectors, including education, healthcare and connectivity. He emphasised the need for sustainable solutions and long-term benefits for affected communities, reiterating the government's commitment to a coordinated and people-centric approach to restore normalcy. According to an official statement, the Chief Minister

also interacted with IDPs both at the venue and via video conference, listening to concerns related to resettlement, pension access, schooling for displaced children and healthcare facilities. Representatives from several relief camps joined the interaction virtually. IDPs from Nghamun Relief Camp in Kangpokpi were rep-

resented by Minister Nemcha Kipgen. Those from Torbung Prefabricated Camp in Churachandpur were represented by MLA Letzang Haokip, while Sadhbhav Mandap camps at Khomeinthang and Tuibong were represented by MLAs L. M. Khaute and Paolienlal Haokip, respectively.

During the interaction, MLA L.M. Khaute raised concerns regarding job cards and pending financial entitlements. The Chief Minister responded that special job cards can be transferred between districts through an official process and advised that pending cases be submitted through the respective MLAs for resolution.

The meeting forms part of the state government's ongoing efforts to accelerate rehabilitation and provide structured support to families displaced by the violence, with a focus on restoring livelihoods and essential services.

Zubeen Garg 'Above Politics', Cremation Site Not for Political Arena: Priyanka Gandhi



GUWAHATI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi on Thursday said late Assamese singer Zubeen Garg was "above politics" and urged political leaders not to turn his cremation ground into a political arena. After paying homage at 'Zubeen Khetra' in Sonapur on the outskirts of Guwahati, Gandhi said her visit was solely to offer respects to the cultural icon. "Zubeen Garg was above politics. His cremation ground should be a sacred place and should not be used for politics," she told reporters. Her remarks came amid intensifying political exchanges in the state, particularly over repeated allegations made by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma against state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi. Responding to questions about Sarma's claims linking Gogoi to Pakistan, Gandhi described the attacks as divisive and unnecessary. "There are two types of leaders in politics - one who does positive politics and the other who does

polarisation. Gaurav Gogoi is doing the politics of love," she said.

She asserted that Gogoi is "a positive person" who seeks to bring constructive engagement into public life, and suggested that this was why he was being targeted. "People of Assam understand this. But the attacks on Gaurav and his family are the wrong politics. Nobody should attack the family and children (of a political leader)," she added. Gandhi also urged the chief minister to focus on governance and development issues. Instead of personal allegations, she said, the state government should address concerns related to employment, women's safety and economic opportunities. Referring to corruption allegations, she said such issues reflected "a betrayal of the people of the state". Her comments come against the backdrop of an escalating war of words between the ruling BJP and the Congress in Assam, with political rhetoric sharpening ahead of the Assembly elections.

Amit Shah Urges Tripura to Adopt Devanagari Script Amid Kokborok Roman Script Demand

AGARTALA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah appealed to Tripura to adopt the Devanagari script for the Kokborok language, amid ongoing demands by the Tipra Motha Party and other indigenous groups for the adoption of the Roman script.

Shah made the remarks while addressing the Eastern, North-Eastern and Northern Regional Rajbhasha Sammelan at the International Indoor Exhibition Centre in Hapania.

Referring to the linguistic diversity of the state, he said that people in Tripura commonly speak Bangla, Kokborok and Hindi.

"In Tripura, there has been no conflict centred around language or script. All three languages are progressing simultaneously. In the North East, many people have brought recognition to the region through Hindi, including Dr Bhuben Hazarika, S. D. Burman, R. D. Burman, Zubeen Garg and others. Everyone should accept the Devanagari script and communicate in this dialect," Shah said.



He noted that some sections in Tripura are advocating the adoption of the Roman script for Kokborok, but urged reconsideration.

"I want to request them that, especially in the North East, almost all local languages have adopted the Devanagari script. Tripura

should also accept it to strengthen its identity. Our identity can be preserved in our country's script, not a foreign script. By accepting this, everyone can progress further, and script and language should not become a matter of controversy. It is built for development," Shah said.

Emphasising the unifying role of Devanagari, he referred to the advocacy of Vinoba Bhawe and said the script forms the base for numerous Indian languages.

"By linking Devanagari with all dialects, we can preserve more than 2,000 dialects of the country. These dialects will not disappear. To safeguard them, we must strengthen the Devanagari script movement even further and take it two steps ahead," he added.

Highlighting the transformation of the North East, Shah said there was a time when the region was associated with shutdowns, blockades and violence, but today it is witnessing growth in tourism and investment.

He said holding the Rajbhasha Sammelan in Tripura was significant, noting that the North East is uniquely suited to strengthen Indian languages and the official language framework.

"Across the eight states, more than 200 languages and dialects are spoken. Such diversity, tradition and richness are hardly found elsewhere. There are over 200 indigenous communities, 160 sub-tribes and more than 50 unique festivals. The North East has a rich culture you will not find anywhere else," he said, reiterating his appeal for wider acceptance of the Devanagari script.

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Love marriage? Gujarat govt to alert parents via WhatsApp



AHMEDABAD

Gujarat plans to tighten marriage registration rules: parents to be alerted via WhatsApp for love marriages, 40-day certification window proposed, and stricter identity, witness and notary checks introduced to boost transparency and prevent fraud.

In a move that blends administrative reform with social signalling, the Gujarat government has initiated amendments to the Gujarat Registration of Marriages Rules, triggering a sharp political and social debate over privacy, parental consent and safeguards against identity fraud.

The proposal, announced in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, seeks public objections and suggestions first, before finalising a framework designed to make the marriage registration process "transparent, secure and legally robust".

At the core of the pro-

posed overhaul lies a controversial provision: once a couple applies for a love marriage registration, the girl's parents will automatically receive the submitted details through WhatsApp, while the marriage certificate would be issued on the 40th day after application.

The government argues this delay window creates a verification buffer to detect coercion, misrepresentation or forged identity claims. Defending the move with hard language, Home Minister Harsh Sanghvi told the House, "We are not against love. But if someone becomes 'Salim Suresh' to trap a daughter with a fake identity, the state will not allow such deceit to succeed."

He asserted that genuine couples with parental approval would face no hurdles, but those hiding identities would be subjected to strict scrutiny.

Linking safety with process reform, Sanghvi said

notary validation must now occur in the presence of all concerned parties, warning of "strict action" if documentation is executed in absentia.

The proposed system also mandates full disclosure of witnesses' identities, photographs and Aadhaar copies, while court-based government registration would become compulsory to prevent manipulation through informal channels.

Crucially, the government plans a dedicated online portal where every application becomes digitally trackable; the moment a registration request is filed, parents would receive real-time details shared by their Children. The administration insists the amendments are not moral policing but a calibrated legal shield one that seeks to balance personal choice with protection against fraud, coercion and identity deception in marriage registrations across the state.

'No option left': SC orders deployment of judicial officers in Bengal's SIR exercise

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court of India on Friday ordered the deployment of judicial officers, including serving and retired judges, to ensure the smooth conduct of the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise in poll-bound West Bengal, citing a clear lack of cooperation between the state government and the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Ruing the "unfortunate blame game" between the EC and the TMC-led government, a bench of CJI Surya Kant and justices Joymaya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi passed the directions after observing that it had to pass the "extraordinary order" due to "extraordinary circumstances."

"There is an unfortunate blame game of allegations and counter allegations which shows trust deficit between the two constitutional functionaries - the state government (West Bengal) and the ECI. Now the process is stuck at the stage of claims and objections of the persons who have been included in the logical discrepancy list," the bench observed.

The top court also permitted the ECI to publish a draft list of voters in the state by February 28 while allowing the panel to also issue supplementary lists later.

While directing the appointment of judicial officers to adjudicate claims and objections in the SIR process in West Bengal, the bench said it had been left with "no option" but to involve the state judiciary, including retired judicial officers, to ensure the completion of the exercise.

The bench observed that there is a "trust deficit" between the West



Bengal Govt and the ECI, forcing it to pass these directions.

The court requested the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court to make available serving and retired judicial officers of the rank of district judge or above for SIR duties after it took serious note of state government not sparing enough grade 'A' officers for the exercise.

"We are left with hardly any other option but to request the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court to spare some serving judicial officers along with some former judicial officers in the rank of Additional District Judge or District Judges who can then in each district aid in disposal or revisiting of

the claims under the logical discrepancy list," the bench said.

Notably, logical discrepancies in progeny linking with the 2002 voter list include instances of a mismatch in the parent's name and the age difference between a voter and their parent being less than 15 years or more than 50 years.

During the hearing, the ECI told the court that it was not being provided adequately qualified officers to ensure the smooth conduct of the SIR exercise. Expressing disappointment with the state government's response, the court said it was issuing directions under these "extraordinary circumstances."

The bench also directed district collectors and SPs of the state to provide logistical support and security to the judicial officers deputed for the ongoing SIR work while making it clear that orders passed by judicial officers will be deemed as orders of court.

It said judicial officers will be assisted by the poll body's micro-observers and state government officials in the SIR process.

The top court clarified that the directions were issued to ensure fairness in adjudicating the genuineness of documents submitted and the consequent inclusion or exclusion of names from the voters' list.

INTERNATIONAL

Saudi Arabia may have uranium enrichment under proposed deal with US, arms control experts warn

DUBAI

Saudi Arabia could have some form of uranium enrichment within the kingdom under a proposed nuclear deal with the US, congressional documents and an arms control group suggest, raising proliferation concerns as an atomic standoff between Iran and America continues.

US Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden both tried to reach a nuclear deal with the kingdom to share American technology.

Nonproliferation experts warn any spinning centrifuges within Saudi Arabia could open the door to a possible weapons program for the kingdom, something its assertive crown prince has suggested he could pursue if Tehran obtains an atomic bomb.

Already, Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan signed a mutual defense pact last year after Israel launched an attack on Qatar targeting Hamas officials. Pakistan's defense minister then said his nation's nuclear program "will be made available" to Saudi Arabia if needed, something seen as a warning for Israel, long believed to be the Middle East's only nuclear-armed state.

"Nuclear cooperation can be a positive mechanism for upholding nonproliferation norms and increasing transparency, but the devil is in the details," wrote Kelsey Davenport, the director for nonproliferation policy at the Washington-based Arms Control Association.

The documents raise "concerns that the Trump administration has not carefully considered the proliferation risks posed by its proposed nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia or the precedent this agreement may set."

Saudi Arabia did not immediately respond to questions Friday from The Associated Press.

US President Donald Trump stands with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on his visit



to the White House, Nov. 18, 2025, in Washington.

The congressional document, also seen by the AP, shows the Trump administration aims to reach 20 nuclear business deals with nations around the world, including Saudi Arabia. The deal with Saudi Arabia could be worth billions of dollars, it adds.

The document contends that reaching a deal with the kingdom "will advance the national security interests of the United States, breaking with the failed policies of inaction and indecision that our competitors have capitalized on to disadvantage American industry and diminish the United States standing globally in this critical sector."

China, France, Russia and South Korea are among the leading nations that sell nuclear power plant technology abroad.

The draft deal would see America and Saudi Arabia enter safeguard deals with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog. That would include oversight of the "most proliferation-sensitive areas of potential nuclear cooper-

ation," it added. It listed enrichment, fuel fabrication and reprocessing as potential areas.

US President Donald Trump stands with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on his visit to the White House, Nov. 18, 2025, in Washington. The IAEA, based in Vienna, did not immediately respond to questions. Saudi Arabia is a member state to the IAEA, which promotes peaceful nuclear work but also inspects nations to ensure they don't have clandestine atomic weapons programs.

"This suggests that once the bilateral safeguards agreement is in place, it will open the door for Saudi Arabia to acquire uranium enrichment technology or capabilities — possibly even from the United States," Davenport wrote. "Even with restrictions and limits, it seems likely that Saudi Arabia will have a path to some type of uranium enrichment or access to knowledge about enrichment."

Enrichment isn't an automatic path to a nuclear weapon — a nation also must master other steps including the use of synchronized high explosives, for instance. But it does open the door

to weaponization, which has fueled the concerns of the West over Iran's program.

The United Arab Emirates, a neighbor to Saudi Arabia, signed what is referred to as a "123 agreement" with the US to build its Barakah nuclear power plant with South Korean assistance. But the UAE did so without seeking enrichment, something nonproliferation experts have held up as the "gold standard" for nations wanting atomic power.

US President Donald Trump stands with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on his visit to the White House, Nov. 18, 2025, in Washington.

The push for a Saudi-US deal comes as Trump threatens military action against Iran if it doesn't reach a deal over its nuclear program. The Trump military push follows nationwide protests in Iran that saw its theocratic government launch a bloody crackdown on dissent that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands more reportedly detained.

In Iran's case, it long has insisted its nuclear enrichment program is peaceful. However, the West and the IAEA say Iran had an organized military nuclear program up until 2003. Tehran also had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90% — making it the only country in the world to do so without a weapons program.

Iranian diplomats long have pointed to 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's comments as a binding fatwa, or religious edict, that Iran won't build an atomic bomb. However, Iranian officials increasingly have made the threat they could seek the bomb as tensions have risen with the US.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's day-to-day ruler, has said if Iran obtains the bomb, "we will have to get one."

Police search former home of ex-UK royal Andrew, a day after his arrest in Epstein-linked probe

LONDON

Police continued on Friday to search the former home of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, a day after the former prince was held in custody for the best part of 11 hours on suspicion of misconduct in public office linked to his friendship with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Following one of the most tumultuous days in the modern history of Britain's royal family, the former Prince Andrew is back at his new home on the Sandringham estate, King Charles III's private retreat, which is around 115 miles (185 kilometers) north of London.

Police have concluded their search there but are still searching Royal Lodge, his 30-room former home in the grounds of Windsor Castle, just west of the capital.

Mountbatten-Windsor, who was pictured slouching in the back of his chauffeur-driven car following his release on Thursday evening, remains under investigation, which means he has neither been charged nor exonerated by Thames Valley Police, the force responsible for areas west of London.

Artist Kaya Mar poses with the newest edition of his paintings for the media in front of Buckingham Palace, London, Friday, Feb. 20, 2026, after Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested and held for hours by British police on suspicion of misconduct in public office related to his links to Jeffrey Epstein.

His arrest follows years of allegations over his links with Epstein, who took his own life in a New York prison in 2019.

The accusation at the heart of his arrest is that Mountbatten-Windsor—who was known as Prince Andrew until October when his brother stripped him of his titles

and honors — shared confidential trade information with the disgraced financier when he was a trade envoy for the UK.

Specifically, emails released last month by the US Department of Justice appeared to show Mountbatten-Windsor sharing reports of official visits to Hong Kong, Vietnam and Singapore.

One, dated November 2010, appeared to be forwarded by Andrew five minutes after he had received it. Another a few weeks later appeared to show him sending Epstein a confidential brief on investment opportunities in the reconstruction of Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Other police forces in the UK are also conducting their own investigations into Mountbatten-Windsor's Epstein-related links.

Mountbatten-Windsor has consistently denied any wrongdoing in his association with Epstein but has not commented on the most recent allegations that have emerged with the release of the so-called Epstein files.

Artist Kaya Mar poses with the newest edition of his paintings for the media in front of Buckingham Palace, London, Friday, Feb. 20, 2026, after Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested and held for hours by British police on suspicion of misconduct in public office related to his links to Jeffrey Epstein.

Police swept into the grounds of Mountbatten-Windsor's home to arrest him at 8 am Thursday — his 66th birthday — before taking him to a nearby police station for questioning. It's not known what he told them. He may have said nothing, or "no comment," as is his right.

Experts said that misconduct in a public office is notoriously difficult to prove. "Firstly, it must

be determined if Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was in a role within government that constitutes the title of public officer," said Sean Caulfield, a criminal defense lawyer at Hodge Jones & Allen.

"There is no standard definition to clearly draw on."

The Crown Prosecution Service will ultimately make a decision about charging him. Andrew Gilmore, a partner at Grosvenor Law, said that prosecutors will apply the two-stage test known as the "Code for Crown Prosecutors."

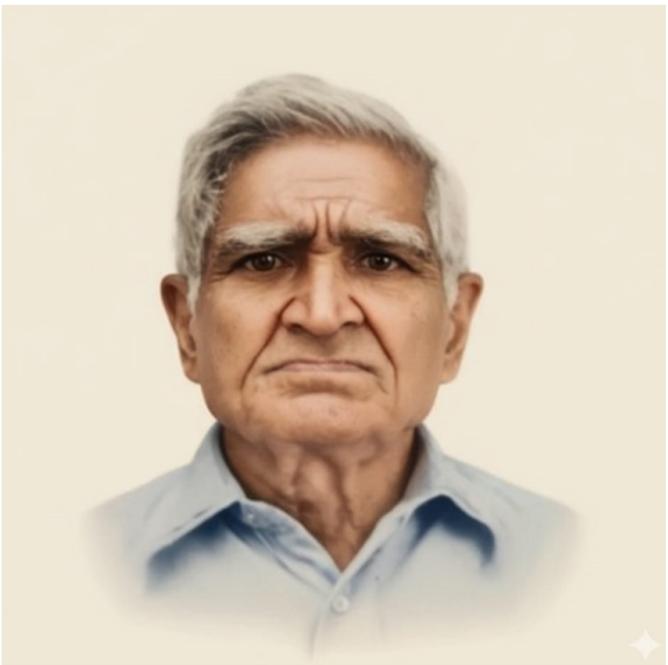
"That test is to determine whether there is a more realistic prospect of a conviction than not based on the evidence and whether the matter is in the public interest," he said. "If these two tests are met, then the matter will be charged and proceed to court."

Artist Kaya Mar poses with the newest edition of his paintings for the media in front of Buckingham Palace, London, Friday, Feb. 20, 2026, after Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested and held for hours by British police on suspicion of misconduct in public office related to his links to Jeffrey Epstein.

Mountbatten-Windsor was the first royal since King Charles I nearly four centuries ago to be placed under arrest. That turned into a seismic moment in British history, leading to civil war, Charles' beheading and the temporary abolition of the monarchy.

His arrest is undoubtedly one of the gravest crises to affect the House of Windsor since its establishment more than 100 years ago. Arguably, only the abdication of King Edward VIII in 1936 and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 have been as grave for the institution of the British monarchy in modern times.

Public Leader Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury - A Shining Symbol of Humanity



SANGRAM DATTA:

Sreemangal, Bangladesh—the city of tea, hills, and natural beauty. Alongside its lush greenery and the affection of nature, the pages of history shine with the contributions of some great individuals.

One such extraordinary name is Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury (Known as K.B. Dev Chowdhury)—a philanthropist, social reformer, education enthusiast, and humane public leader who devoted every chapter of his life to the service of society and humanity.

Early Life and Family Background
Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury (K. B. Dev Chowdhury) was born on 4 October 1906 into a distinguished zamindar family. He was the youngest among four brothers. His elder brothers were Rasabihari Dev Chowdhury, Pulin Bihari Dev Chowdhury, and Binod Bihari Dev Chowdhury. His father was the renowned zamindar, educationist, philanthropist, and social worker Radhanath Dev Chowdhury, and his mother was Jaytara Dev Chowdhury. Zamindar Radhanath Dev Chowdhury was born on 31 August 1875.

Radhanath Dev Chowdhury was one of the most influential zamindars and highest taxpayers of the Assam Province during British India. Along with his vast zamindari estates, he owned various business establishments and 57 agencies. His principal business connections were with Calcutta and England.

Education, Philanthropy, and His Father's Social Contributions

During the British period, among those who played a quiet yet profoundly influential role in the development of education, society, and culture in Sreemangal, Radhanath Dev Chowdhury stands out as a distinguished figure. In memory of his parents—his mother, Dinomoyi Dev Chowdhury, and his father, Chandranath Dev Chowdhury—he took a leading role in establishing educational institutions, contributions that remain respectfully remembered in the history of Sreemangal to this day.

Honoring the memory of his mother, he donated valuable land adjacent to the Sreemangal Choumuhani area for the establishment of Dinomoyi Girls' School. At a time when women's education had not yet gained due recognition in society, this initiative was a progressive and timely act of remarkable courage and foresight.

Similarly, in memory of his father, Radhanath Dev Chowdhury donated land during the British era to establish Chandranath Primary School. This institution greatly facilitated access to education for the general population and marked the beginning of an important chapter in the educational history of Sreemangal.

Unfortunately, in later years, due to narrow-mindedness and a lack of historical awareness, the name "Dinomoyi" was removed, and the school was renamed Sreemangal Government Girls' High School. As a result, the present generation remains

largely unaware of the institution's true history, its land donor, and the contributions of its founder. The neglect of such a significant chapter of history, instead of granting it due recognition, is undeniably disappointing.

Beyond education, Radhanath Dev Chowdhury also made notable contributions in the religious and cultural spheres. On Habiganj Road in Sreemangal town, he built the idol temple and namdar (theatre hall) of Sri Sri Jagannath Dev's Akhara. For a long time, this establishment has served as an important center for religious rituals, social gatherings, and cultural practices.

Sreemangal Town Committee and Administrative Role

Under the provisions of the Assam Municipal Act of 1923, the official inauguration of Sreemangal Small Town took place on 1 October 1923.

On this occasion, Radhanath Dev Chowdhury arranged a special celebration by importing a cake from Kent, England, for the inauguration of the Sreemangal Town Committee—an exceptional event in the municipal history of Sreemangal.

From 1 October 1923 to 8 May 1937, Radhanath Dev Chowdhury served as a member of the first council of the Sreemangal Town Committee. At that time, Girija Shankar Guha, the Sub-Divisional Officer of South Sylhet, served as Chairman.

Later, during the third council (20 April 1943–2 December 1952), his eldest son Rasabihari Dev Chowdhury was elected as a member.

In the fourth council (1 December 1952–14 January 1956), the youngest son Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury served as Vice Chairman.

Subsequently, from 14 January 1956 to 20 June 1960, he was elected as a member.

Again, during the seventh council (24 February 1965–16 December 1971), he served as a member of the Sreemangal Town Committee.

Radhanagar Hill: From Heritage to a Modern Tourist Destination

Surrounded by Sreemangal's lush greenery and blue skies lies Radhanagar, a breathtaking hilly area. Once a silent hill settlement, today it has become an international-standard tourist destination, attracting domestic and foreign visitors daily.

Five-star hotels, modern resorts, and the aroma of tea gardens have transformed Radhanagar into a dreamland.

Behind this name lies a forgotten history and the contribution of a remarkable personality—Radhanath Dev Chowdhury.

During the British era, he purchased approximately 178 bighas of land in the Doluchhara hills of Sreemangal. Later, his four sons inherited the property. Some portions were sold, while others were gradually encroached upon.

The area became known as "Radhanagar", named after Radhanath Dev Chowdhury. Through his influence and contributions, the settlement gradually gained recognition.

What was once a secluded hill region has now secured a place on the international tourism map.

Today, the slopes of Radhanagar are adorned with pineapple, lemon, jackfruit, and tea gardens, alongside rows of resorts, hotels, and motels. The internationally acclaimed Grand Sultan Tea Resort & Golf stands proudly on these hills.

Domestic and foreign investors continue to invest here, creating new tourism infrastructure and employment opportunities for local people. Radhanagar has become a hub of investment and tourism.

To the younger generation, Radhanagar represents natural beauty, luxury, and modern entertainment—yet many remain unaware that Radhanath Dev Chowdhury laid the foundation of this development.

Despite his immense contributions, no comprehensive research or memorial institution has yet been established in his honor. Yet Radhanagar—bearing his name—has elevated the tourism potential of Sreemangal and the entire Sylhet region to global prominence.

Preserving his memory is not merely honoring an individual; it is preserving the living history of the region.

If a museum, information center, or memorial were established in his name, future generations would learn how one man's vision transformed a region into a world-renowned destination.

Radhanagar shines today with the light of development. Now, its history must be illuminated as well—the story of where this dream began.

Death of Radhanath Dev Chowdhury
The zamindar and educationist Radhanath Dev Chowdhury passed away on 1 February 1963 at the age of approximately 83 years.

Abolition of Zamindari and Distribution of Family Property
When the zamindari system was abolished in Pakistan in 1950, the vast property in Bhubirbagh area under Nabiganj Thana was taken over by the government under the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act.

Of the remaining 50 hal of land, 25 hal went to the eldest son Rasabihari Dev Chowdhury, and the remaining 25 hal were divided among the other three sons.

Some lands belonging to Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury and his brothers remain encroached upon even today.

He lived with his family in a beautiful century-old building constructed during the British era on Pura Bazar (Old Bazar) Road at Sreemangal town.

During British rule, he purchased land where Radhanath Cinema Hall now stands, as well as properties in Kumarghat and Manikbhandar of Tripura State, India.

In Biraimpur, he owned 48 bighas of land, of which 31 decimals were donated to establish Radhanath Primary School (now Biraimpur Primary School). Unfortunately, due to administrative decisions, the name Radhanath was changed—despite the donation deed clearly stating that the land would revert to the heirs if the name were altered.

Extensive Properties Across British India
Radhanath Dev Chowdhury and his sons owned properties not only in Sreemangal or Assam, but across various provinces of British India. At that time, Assam, Tripura, and other regions were under a unified administrative system, allowing unrestricted trade and land transactions.

They owned significant land in Assam Province and Tripura State, notably large valuable estates in Kumarghat and an ancestral home in Manikbhandar, Tripura.

During the 1971 Liberation War, many Muslim, Christian, and Hindu families, including freedom fighters and former Sreemangal Chairman M. A. Musabbir, took refuge in that house.



War, he was detained for six months under the State Security Act.

During the 1965 Indo-Pak Liberation War and Post-Independence Period

During the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh, he was an organizer and motivator, encouraging youths through meetings in Sreemangal and India.

In the 1970 Provincial Assembly election, he contested as a NAP candidate against Awami League candidate Md. Altafur Rahman Chowdhury.

After independence, in 1972, his ancestral residence was attacked due to political rivalry. Despite looting and damage, his family remained safe.

In 1973, army personnel raided his home, wrongfully arresting his second son Kanak Lal Dev Chowdhury, who was later released after intervention following his wife Usha Rani Dev Chowdhury's meeting with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In 1974, he was detained on allegations of wheat smuggling but was acquitted after 17 days.

Humanitarianism and Philanthropy
He was closely associated with Sreemangal Victoria High School, Dinmoyee Girls' School, and numerous social and cultural institutions.

During the 1974 famine, he personally arranged daily meals for approximately 200 impoverished people.

In 1978, President Shaheed Ziaur Rahman stayed at BTRI Rest House during his Sreemangal visit, where Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury hosted him with his favorite dishes.

During communal violence following the Babri Mosque incident on 7 December 1989, his ancestral home was again attacked, ransacked and looted.

Family Life
He was the father of ten children—six sons and four daughters. The children were Kantilal, Utpala, Kanak Lal, Urmila, Uttama, Kanan (Babla), Uttara, Uttam Kumar, Pannalal (Tutul) and Santanu Dev Chowdhury respectively.

Legacy and Passing
A politician, social reformer, and philanthropist, Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury was a secular, liberal, and humane individual.

He passed away on 10 September 1995, leaving behind a rich legacy of service to humanity and education.

Last Word
The life of Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury teaches us that true greatness lies not in wealth, but in selfless service to society.

He was a beacon of light—whose philanthropy, humanity, and leadership continue to shine like an eternal flame in the history of Sreemangal.

A person who dedicates his life to social welfare never truly dies—his deeds make him immortal.

They also operated BD Factory in both Sreemangal and Manikbhandar.

After the 1947 Partition, many properties in Tripura and Assam were encroached upon due to border and administrative changes. Nevertheless, their historical legacy remains a source of pride in local history.

Business Ventures and Entrepreneurship

Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury was also a successful entrepreneur and visionary businessman. His enterprises were respectively Foreign liquor outlet, Rice and flour mills, Saw mill, Leaf bidi plantation, Timber estate business, Cinema hall, Husk trade, Rod, cement, tin, and hardware business.

These businesses remained operational until 1977.

He also owned two tea estates at Cachar District in Assam, including Chargola Valley Tea Estate, which he managed until 1965. Due to war conditions and passport cancellation, these estates were later encroached upon.

Political Life and Struggles

Driven by humanitarian values and justice, he entered politics to serve the people. During British rule, he was initially associated with the Indian National Congress and later with the Forward Bloc.

During the 1947 Sylhet Referendum, he played a significant role as an active member of the Committee for Inclusion with India, led by Congress leader Laku Datta Chowdhury of Bhuboir in Sreemangal.

After the creation of Pakistan, he lived in near hiding for several years and faced repeated police raids.

In 1957, he joined the National Awami Party (NAP) and remained a dedicated member until his death.

He financially supported party activities and bore the election expenses of Syed Mujibur Rahman, NAP (Mozaffar) candidate, in the 1973 election.

Due to political repression, he was imprisoned in 1953, 1965, and 1974.

During the 1965 Indo-Pak Liberation War and Post-Independence Period

During the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh, he was an organizer and motivator, encouraging youths through meetings in Sreemangal and India.

In the 1970 Provincial Assembly election, he contested as a NAP candidate against Awami League candidate Md. Altafur Rahman Chowdhury.

After independence, in 1972, his ancestral residence was attacked due to political rivalry. Despite looting and damage, his family remained safe.

In 1973, army personnel raided his home, wrongfully arresting his second son Kanak Lal Dev Chowdhury, who was later released after intervention following his wife Usha Rani Dev Chowdhury's meeting with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In 1974, he was detained on allegations of wheat smuggling but was acquitted after 17 days.

Humanitarianism and Philanthropy
He was closely associated with Sreemangal Victoria High School, Dinmoyee Girls' School, and numerous social and cultural institutions.

During the 1974 famine, he personally arranged daily meals for approximately 200 impoverished people.

In 1978, President Shaheed Ziaur Rahman stayed at BTRI Rest House during his Sreemangal visit, where Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury hosted him with his favorite dishes.

During communal violence following the Babri Mosque incident on 7 December 1989, his ancestral home was again attacked, ransacked and looted.

Family Life
He was the father of ten children—six sons and four daughters. The children were Kantilal, Utpala, Kanak Lal, Urmila, Uttama, Kanan (Babla), Uttara, Uttam Kumar, Pannalal (Tutul) and Santanu Dev Chowdhury respectively.

Legacy and Passing
A politician, social reformer, and philanthropist, Khirad Bihari Dev Chowdhury was a secular, liberal, and humane individual.

He passed away on 10 September 1995, leaving behind a rich legacy of service to humanity and education.

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