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PERSPECTIVE
You don't need a certain number of friends. You just need a number of friends you can be certain of.

Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Passes Bill Providing Special Provisions for Transgender Inmates

SHILLONG
The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on Saturday passed a landmark piece of legislation introducing specific safeguards and welfare measures for transgender inmates, marking a significant step in the state's push for inclusive prison reforms and rights-based correctional administration.

The legislation, titled the Meghalaya Prison and Correctional Services Bill, 2026, was tabled earlier this week by Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar. The Bill lays down a distinct prison management framework for transgender prisoners, formally recognising their specific vulnerabilities and needs within custodial settings.

Under the newly passed law, prison authorities will be required to provide separate enclosures or wards for transgender inmates, including both trans men and trans women, as prescribed under detailed rules to be framed subsequently. The move is aimed at ensuring safety, privacy, and protection from harassment or violence within correctional institutions.

The Bill further mandates access to dedicated healthcare facilities for transgender prisoners. This includes medical care tailored to gender-specific needs as well as psycho-social support services to safeguard their mental and emotional well-being. Officials indicated that the provisions seek to address long-standing concerns over inadequate healthcare and the absence of structured support systems for transgender individuals in custody.

WHO SAID WHAT



"The United States military began major combat operations in Iran. Our objective is to defend the American people by eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime, a vicious group of very hard, terrible people."
~ Donald J. Trump, President of the USA

Manipur CM Pushes for Timely Completion of Rs 3,647-Crore MURDAMIP

IMPHAL
Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Friday night reviewed the progress of major urban infrastructure works in Greater Imphal, directing officials to ensure quality execution and timely completion of projects under the Rs 3,647-crore Manipur Urban Road, Drainage and Asset Management Improvement Project (MURDAMIP) and the city's integrated sewerage system.

Chairing a high-level meeting at the Chief Minister's Secretariat, Singh met MLAs and senior officials of the Water Resources Department and Public Works Department (PWD) to assess ongoing sewerage and concrete road works aimed at transforming the capital's urban landscape.

The review comes amid accelerated efforts to modernise Imphal's civic infrastructure in response to rapid urban growth that has strained existing road networks, drainage systems, and sanitation facilities.

In a post on X following the meeting, the Chief Minister underlined the need for forward-looking planning and durable construction.

"Our sewerage infrastructure must be forward-looking and capable of adapting to the rapid urban growth of the capital

region," Singh stated. He also stressed that concrete pavement works should guarantee durability and longevity, minimising the need for frequent repairs and maintenance.

He described the review as productive and said clear directions were issued to uphold the highest construction standards while ensuring adherence to project timelines.

The state government has positioned the infrastructure push as part of a broader vision to build a modern, resilient, and citizen-centric urban ecosystem in Manipur. Officials informed the meeting that MURDAMIP remains the principal infrastructure initiative underway in Imphal as of early 2026. The project, partly funded by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, involves a total outlay of Rs 3,647 crore.

The project covers 547 kilometres of road network across Greater Imphal and includes the construction of rigid (concrete) pavements alongside concrete-lined and covered stormwater drains on both sides of roads.

The integrated approach aims to tackle one of the city's long-standing civic problems—chronic waterlogging and seasonal flooding caused by inadequate drainage and unplanned urban expansion.

Concrete roadside drains are being constructed in tandem with road improvements to ensure effective stormwater management. Officials said the emphasis on rigid pavements is intended to enhance load-bearing capacity and reduce maintenance costs over the long term.

Waterlogging has been a persistent challenge in several parts of Imphal, particularly during the monsoon season. Poor drainage infrastructure has not only disrupted daily life but also contributed to the deterioration of road surfaces and public health risks.

Under MURDAMIP, covered drains are being installed to facilitate efficient runoff while reducing open exposure of wastewater. The project is also expected to improve asset management and maintenance systems, allowing authorities to monitor and sustain infrastructure more effectively.

Authorities said the initiative is designed to provide long-term solutions rather than short-term fixes, aligning with the Chief Minister's directive for sustainable and durable construction.

Parallel to the PWD-led road and drainage works, the state government is developing an integrated sewerage system for Imphal city to manage wastewater more effectively.

Congress Finalises 45 Names for Assam Polls, Withholds List Pending BJP Announcement



GUWAHATI

The Congress has prepared an initial list of 45 candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, retaining most of its sitting MLAs, but is likely to delay the formal announcement until the BJP unveils its own lineup.

Party insiders said the names were cleared during a virtual meeting of the Central Election Committee (CEC) on Friday, where recommendations from the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and the screening committee were reviewed. The leadership is understood to be holding back the public release of the list as a strategic move, allowing room for recalibration once the BJP declares its candidates.

The CEC session also deliberated on ticket allocation for the newly created Binnakandi and Khawang constituencies. While there was discussion about offering these seats to alliance partners, the proposal reportedly met resistance from some sections within the state unit.

The potential candidacies of the sons of Nagaon MP Pradyut Bordoloi and Dhubri MP Rakibul Hussain were also taken up during deliberations, reflecting the party's attempt to balance continuity with generational transition.

The Congress is expected to contest around 100 of Assam's 126 Assem-

bly seats, though negotiations with alliance partners are still underway. Seat-sharing talks have triggered protests within sections of the state unit.

Party workers have opposed reported plans to leave Sarupathar and Bhanipur-Sorbhog seats for the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and the CPM. In Golaghat, Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi reportedly faced protests from local workers unhappy over the proposal to vacate Sarupathar for an ally. Leaders indicated that negotiations remain fluid and adjustments may be made before finalising the broader alliance framework. The developments follow a recent two-day visit to Assam by senior Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who chaired the first screening committee meeting for the state on February 23. During her visit, she interacted extensively with block- and district-level leaders and sought feedback on prospective candidates.

The screening panel included senior leaders such as Jitendra Singh, Manoj Chauhan, Prithviraj Sathé, Vikas Upadhyay, Gaurav Gogoi, and Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Debabrata Saikia. Sources said the exercise focused on assessing local winnability, factional balance and alliance considerations before forwarding recommendations to the CEC. Assam's 126 Assembly constituencies are expected to go to the polls in April, setting the stage for a closely watched contest. With both major parties calibrating their candidate lists and alliance arithmetic, the coming days are likely to see heightened political manoeuvring across the state.

For now, the Congress appears intent on keeping its options open, awaiting the BJP's candidate announcement before making its first list public.

Meghalaya issues health alert as two Agniveer trainees die of suspected meningococcal infection

SHILLONG

After two Agniveer trainees died of suspected meningococcal bacterial infection in Shillong, the Meghalaya government has issued a health advisory, urging people to wear a mask and avoid crowded areas.

The two, who died in the past week, were among 30 trainees at the Assam Regimental Centre in Shillong. The others have been quarantined and kept under medical observation.

The government in an advisory, said the State Surveillance Unit (SSU) had been notified of suspected cases of meningococcal infection.

The District Surveillance Unit (DSU), East Khasi Hills, in coordination with the SSU, has initiated an active epidemiological investigation. Case investigation, contact tracing, laboratory review, and surveillance strengthening measures are underway.

"The SSU reassures the public that the situation is being closely monitored and under control. No new suspected cases have been detected in any other area. All necessary public health measures, including identification and monitoring of close contacts and implementation of appropriate preventive interventions, are being carried out as per standard outbreak response," the advisory read.

The government advised citizens to practice good respiratory hygiene, such as covering their mouth and nose while coughing or sneezing, and maintain regular hand hygiene.

They have also been advised to maintain a balanced and nutritious diet to support overall immunity.

Further, the government advised the people to report to the nearest medical facility in case of sudden high fever, headache, vomiting, rapid spreading purpuric rash, pale limb peripherals at a later stage and circulatory collapse, shock and multi-organ failure.

Transparency and Accountability Key to Strengthening Democracy: Manik Saha

AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday asserted that democracy can be strengthened only when public representatives uphold transparency, accountability and responsibility in the discharge of their duties, and remain answerable to the people they serve. Addressing a seminar on the responsibility and accountability of public representatives in Agartala, Saha urged elected leaders at all levels to carry out their roles with integrity and commitment. The Chief Minister emphasised that public representatives must listen to citizens and interact with them politely and respectfully. He highlighted humility, accessibility and a positive attitude as essential qualities for those entrusted with democratic responsibilities. Reiterating his vision of building a "New Tripura", Saha called upon leaders to rise above party lines and work collectively for the State's progress. Transparency, dedication and accountability, he said, should remain guiding principles so that future generations remember today's leadership with respect. The seminar, described as the first of its kind in Tripura, was held under the guidance of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). The programme was organised by the Tripura Legislative Assembly with support from the CPA, a premier international organisation committed to promoting parliamentary democracy. The event

brought together public representatives from different tiers of governance, including ministers, MLAs and members of zilla parishads, municipalities and nagar panchayats.

Among the dignitaries present were Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Hariwansh Narayan Singh, Tripura Governor N Indrasena Reddy, and Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury. Speaking at the seminar, Hariwansh Narayan Singh said democracy cannot function effectively without accountability. He stressed that public representatives must discharge their responsibilities through regional coordination, capacity building and well-planned legislative strategies. He also underlined the importance of greater awareness of government programmes, stating that informed representatives would be better equipped to present their work before the public. Singh emphasised that development initiatives must reach the grassroots so that governance benefits extend to all sections of society. Overall public welfare, he said, should remain the central objective, adding that economic prosperity can be achieved only through collective efforts, particularly in the context of prevailing geopolitical challenges. The seminar concluded with a renewed call for ethical leadership and strengthened democratic practices, reinforcing the message that accountability and transparency remain fundamental pillars of effective governance in Tripura.

Japan Emerging as Meghalaya's Strategic Development Partner: CM Conrad Sangma

SHILLONG

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Thursday underscored Japan's expanding role as a strategic development partner of the State, stating that the collaboration extends well beyond infrastructure to encompass youth empowerment, agriculture and sustainable livelihoods.

Addressing the inaugural session of the sixth India-Japan Intellectual Conclave 'Kizuna', Sangma said the ties between India and Japan are anchored in mutual respect, democratic values and a shared commitment to economic cooperation and sustainable growth. Describing the theme "Kizuna" - meaning a lasting bond - as deeply symbolic, he said it aptly reflects the evolving partnership.

Highlighting Meghalaya's engagement with Japan, Sangma said the State is prioritising investment in people alongside physical infrastructure. He informed that 47 nurses from Meghalaya have already secured placements



in Japan.

Following his visit to Japan in April 2025, the State government signed a memorandum of understanding with a Japanese company to train and facilitate placement for 500 youths this year. The programme is expected to be scaled up to 5,000 placements over the next five years.

He further noted that Meghalaya has partnered with another firm to support skilled youth placements in Japan and

has established a Japanese language training centre in Shillong to equip aspirants with the required linguistic proficiency.

In the agriculture sector, Sangma announced that India's first commercial production of shiitake mushroom blocks has commenced in Upper Shillong, with technology and marketing support from a Japanese company. The facility has the capacity to produce 1.5 lakh inoculated blocks annually and is expected to benefit more than 1,000 farmers.

The Chief Minister also revealed that the State is exploring the production of locally brewed sake using indigenous rice varieties in collaboration with a Japanese brewery, signalling a move towards value addition and diversification in agriculture.

Referring to the longstanding partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Sangma said the agency has made substantial investments in Meghalaya's infrastructure, forestry and tourism sectors.

Under the JICA-supported MegLIFE project, 22,500 hectares of forest are being restored across 500 villages in 11 districts, reinforcing the State's sustainability goals.

He added that renovation work at the Umiam Hydro Power Station and the Umiam-Umtru Stage III Hydroelectric Power Station is being undertaken with JICA support. Additionally, the nearly 19-km river bridge connecting Dhubri in Assam to Phulwari is also being primarily funded by the agency.

Observing that nearly 74 per cent of Meghalaya's population is below the age of 35, Sangma proposed the creation of a Meghalaya-Japan Skill Corridor to harness the State's youthful demographic advantage.

"The energy and aspirations of our young population can be effectively paired with Japan's technological expertise," he said, adding that such collaboration could create a robust pathway for employment and knowledge exchange.

The Chief Minister also highlighted growing cultural exchanges, noting that

the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival has featured an exclusive Japanese pavilion over the past two years, showcasing Japanese traditions, cuisine and performances.

Inviting Japanese businesses and academic institutions to expand engagement with Meghalaya, Sangma identified priority sectors including circular economy, climate resilience, technol-

ogy, agriculture and sustainable tourism. Earlier in the day, Sangma visited an exhibition of artefacts from the Imphal Peace Museum and the North East Archives.

The event was attended by senior dignitaries, including representatives from Japan and India, further underscoring the deepening partnership between Meghalaya and Japan.

Bharat Ko Jano & Border Area Programme
&
Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026
2nd March, 2026

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5:00 PM



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INDIA'S STRATEGIC TURN IN THE AI ERA

The AI Impact Summit opened with serious policy deliberations. Yet one episode briefly entered public discourse: a robotic dog.

When an imported robot was presented as indigenous innovation, its clip circulated widely online. The episode did not define the summit. It did, however, sharpen a deeper question: how should AI readiness be assessed?

Away from the exhibition floor, institutions such as Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur have been developing indigenous quadruped robotic platforms through sustained research. The contrast is instructive. Demonstrations generate headlines. Institutions generate capability.

That distinction framed the summit's deeper message. Artificial intelligence is no longer about who unveils the cleverest prototype. It is about who builds the most trusted ecosystem.

More than 100 countries gathered in India in 2026, extending a dialogue that began in the United Kingdom in 2023 and continued through South Korea and France. Earlier meetings centred largely on safety and risk mitigation. In New Delhi, the emphasis widened toward developmental impact.

The summit concluded with the New Delhi Declaration, endorsed by a broad coalition of nations and institutions, emphasising cooperation, inclusive growth and equitable access to AI capabilities. It underscored that technological progress must align with social empowerment and human-centred outcomes.

For emerging economies, that shift is material. The debate moved from containing risk to expanding opportunity.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has linked AI to India's 2047 development vision. The credibility of that ambition rests on economic and institutional depth.

If the measure shifts from prototypes to ecosystems, the relevant question becomes structural: what foundations sustain AI capability?

Artificial intelligence is built in layers. Energy forms the base. Reliable electricity and renewable expansion determine compute capacity.

Infrastructure and hardware follow. Data centres, semiconductor access and GPU availability shape who can train and deploy advanced systems independently.

Here geopolitics becomes operational. Rare earth elements are essential for high-performance electronics. Brazil holds roughly 23 percent of global rare-earth reserves, second only to China. Engagement between Modi and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has placed critical minerals and technology cooperation on the bilateral agenda. Diversifying supply chains reduces concentration risk and strengthens India's hardware backbone. Domestic orchestration is equally important. The IndiaAI Mission enables access to more than 38,000 GPUs at approximately \$65 per hour, lowering entry barriers for startups and researchers. AI Kosh hosts over 7,500 datasets designed to improve diversity and mitigate bias, broadening participation rather than concentrating it. Language capability is another structural pillar. Initiatives such as AI4Bharat and Bhashini are embedding Indian languages into foundational models, strengthening digital inclusion.

When energy, compute and data align with policy direction, ecosystems move from experimentation to scale.

Scale, however, is only the first milestone. Capacity alone does not translate into influence. Adoption does.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has noted that roughly 100 million Indians use ChatGPT every week. At that scale, India is central to the evolution of AI systems.

Capital markets have responded. Anthropic has opened a Bengaluru office. Blackstone is set to acquire a majority stake in Neysa, signalling investor confidence in India's compute backbone.

India is positioning itself to shape standards and deployment models. Open-source ecosystems allow researchers and startups to adapt systems to local realities without prohibitive licensing barriers. Domestic players such as Sarvam AI are building multilingual, cost-effective models suited to Indian and Global South contexts.

Diplomacy reinforces this transition. Engagements with European partners have expanded cooperation in semiconductors, quantum technologies and digital innovation, while discussions with Mauritius and Sri Lanka have centred on digital public infrastructure and AI for development. Trade, technology and development are increasingly aligned.

This is the difference between being a market and becoming an architect.

But architecture ultimately proves itself in application.

Where Systems Meet Society

Strategic positioning matters only if it produces capability on the ground.

In education, connected classrooms, including experiments with electronic learning boards supported by telecom platforms such as Reliance Jio, extend structured learning beyond metropolitan centres.

In healthcare, startups such as Niramai Health Analytics use thermal AI imaging to detect breast cancer early, reducing diagnostic delay.

Across rural India, organisations such as Kanya enable individuals to undertake micro-tasks essential to training AI models. These distributed contributions form the ground truth on which intelligent systems rely. Artificial intelligence is here to stay. The opportunity before India is to build an ecosystem that strengthens education, sharpens agricultural advisories and modernises social security for the crores of gig and platform workers. An open, scalable and cost-conscious model carries relevance beyond national borders, particularly for the Global South.

The summit will ultimately be judged not by announcements or exhibitions, but by whether India converts infrastructure, mineral partnerships, capital flows and diplomatic alignment into durable public capability.

This time, India is not entering the AI era as a consumer economy. It is investing to become one of its architects.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Space I can recover: Time, never." — Napoleon Bonaparte

FREEBIES = APPEASEMENT : ECONOMICS BE DAMNED!



POONAM I KAUSHISH

Beware Voters: With high-octane poll tamasha in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala soon, be ready to open your purse strings as Parties and netas are busy rolling out a perfect electoral cake iced with populist schemes, lip-smacking freebies galore for all.

Merrily converting political sops into vote percentages wherein social and economic upliftment is weighed on vote-bank scales, as populist hand-outs yield better electoral rewards than reasoned policies and sustainable programmes. After all, our money is neta's money! Sic.

This analogy was brought to the fore by Supreme Court's outburst against the "freebies" culture engulfing the country while hearing a case filed by Tamil Nadu Thursday defending its right to provide subsidized power which is prohibited by a Central law. It chastised State Governments for distributing freebies indiscriminately without even distinguishing between haves and have-nots.

Wondering how revenue deficit States find money to splurge on largesse, it pointedly asked: Are welfare schemes targeted, transparent and fiscally sustainable? Are you following an "appeasement" policy without a thought for the public exchequer ahead of elections? Where is the money coming from? Why give affluent freebies? Why do freebies come to their pockets first?

Instead, is it not States duty to spend money to develop infrastructure, roads, hospitals, schools, medical colleges? Essential services for poor are different from indiscriminate largesse aimed at electoral gains.

Is it not high time States revisit these policies?

Recent examples: Free electricity up to 200 units per month and monthly unemployment allowance for graduates and diploma holders Karnataka, monthly cash transfer to women Odisha, direct cash transfer to women heads of households Madhya Pradesh. Farm loan waiver in Punjab, Karnataka etc alongside free ration distribution in Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh.

Questionably, should our hard-earned tax money be used to boost Parties electoral vote-banks? Shouldn't leaders, Parties pay

from their pockets or funds? Are freebies different from subsidies? Are they good and bad hand-outs? Who decides?

True, the Constitution envisions India as a welfare state through Article 38, which directs State to promote social, economic and political justice and reduce inequalities and Article 39 which ensures equitable distribution of resources and prevents concentration of wealth. Hence, these measures are not appeasement but genuine support for people in need.

Certainly, Parties are obliged to be seen as populist in the no-holds-barred free-for-all electoral race, as it would be stupid to wish away political lollipops to entice voters. Correct, cheap rice, wheat, food or free electricity assurances are justifiable. Government help through subsidies like free education, healthcare and cash transfers can help vulnerable groups survive economic distress, reduce regional and socio-economic disparities, support inclusive growth and in the long run social mobility.

Aren't such concessions imperative in a country where 70% struggle with poverty and inequality and hungry stomachs rummage in garbage bins for rat-infested leftovers? Is it not our leaders' duty to take care of citizens?

But from the appeasement perspective one should never mistake political rhetoric for reality. Politicians cry hoarse for "better deal for poor." Those who want water have been given watershed management programmes. Those who want naukri have been handed G RAM G. Debt-laden farmers have got loan waivers. More trees, not coveted mangoes!

Freebies are generally consumption-oriented rather than productivity-oriented, as they focus more on providing immediate material benefits instead of creating long-term assets or income-generating capacity.

Moreover, excessive freebies strain State finances and reduce funds for long-term development like infrastructure and health. Poor targeting and unplanned spending can increase deficits and public debt. Over time, such measures may encourage dependency and prioritise short-term electoral gains over sustainable economic growth.

As it stands many States operate under revenue deficits. Excessive free schemes reduce funds

for infrastructure, hospitals, and schools and employment generation. Diverting funds for short-term electoral gains may hamper long-term national development. Think: The Economic Survey 2025-26 states spending on unconditional cash transfers and various populist freebie schemes by States would amount to Rs 1.7 lakh crore.

Besides, there is a lack of distinction between affluent and poor who can afford to pay and those who cannot. Consequently, by providing free electricity without distinguishing between the two sections amounts to appeasement rather than welfare. If States want to give subsidies, they should clearly provide for them in the budget. Announcing benefits suddenly, without proper planning, leads to financial uncertainty and can disturb systems like electricity tariff setting.

Further, continuous freebies: free food, cash transfers, scooters-utilities might result in dependency culture, discourage work culture and weaken nation-building by reducing incentives for productive engagement. Alongside, mounting public debt today could burden future generations. Thus, when welfare turns into competitive populism, it risks harming economic stability.

However, given the level of dishonesty, populism and irresponsibility which increasingly governs our political system along-with a leech-infested environment of the unundata takes it all and the economic logic there is no such thing as a free lunch, the measures announced are invitation to disaster as a populist scheme is invariably paid for either in the form of higher taxes or increasing inflation.

Underscoring, what ails India and its burgeoning poor is not poverty, which can be corrected, but the ruthless heartlessness of our netagan who not only lack humility and empathy for the garib. Worse, it exposes their sheer ennu and paucity of ideas along-with accentuating their moral bankruptcy. And a perspective completely divorced from reality.

With India at the cup of becoming the third largest economy in the world, ironically, many are far from basic economic security. Politically, convenient acts of trying to prioritise one cause without the other will not help. Opportunism or hypocrisy is flogged while others are left scot-free will only

worsen heartburn and trust deficit as many are far from basic economic security.

Plainly, we pay taxes for growth and development, better educational institutions, health care, hospitals, infrastructure etc. By providing voters free candies citizens have become dependent on netas resulting in no empowerment. Consequently, people are unable to critically evaluate leaders.

What is needed is a fundamental change in politics rather than throwing rules at a problem which has its origins in political economy. If "freebies" are not checked now the gap between overall growth and mass fortunes will only widen. Clearly our leaders must differentiate between essential welfare and populist hand-outs based on social utility and long-term impact.

Integrate all subsidies into transparent budgetary frameworks and target benefits to gen-

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Today, on National Science Day, we celebrate the spirit of research, innovation and scientific curiosity that drives our nation forward. This day commemorates the groundbreaking discovery of the Raman Effect by Sir CV Raman. This discovery placed Indian research firmly on the global map. We reaffirm our resolve to empower our youth, strengthen research ecosystems and harness science and technology for national development and global good.

~ Narendra Modi, PM



uinely vulnerable sections, avoiding universal subsidies for the affluent. Along-with encourage conditional and outcome-based transfers, linking benefits to education, health or skill development and introduce sunset clauses and periodic review mechanisms for schemes.

Time now for politics and democracy to reinvent itself to manage this problem. Outbursts and grandstanding, even if well intentioned, will not help. Strengthen voter awareness vis-à-vis the opportunity cost of excessive freebies and ensure disclosure of fiscal implications in Party manifestos.

High time all political stalwarts, leaders, Parties and ideologues revisit everything and have a mechanism to spread welfare effectively. Say, 25% revenue should be dedicated entirely for development: roads, irrigation et al.

Else we will be hampering the larger welfare obligations of the Government if we keep on distributing largesse without a care. There has to be a balance.

Time to draw a 'lakshman rekha' on vote-bank politics as democracy cannot allow exercise of public funds as private spending. What is needed is sincere introspection and statesmanship.



Assam Expanding Commando Network to Tackle Emerging Security Threats: Himanta

TINSUKIA

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the State government's decision to expand the Assam Police commando battalions will significantly bolster internal security and prepare Assam to confront emerging challenges, as he inaugurated the 6th Assam Police Commando Battalion headquarters at Ambikapur in Tinsukia district.

Addressing officials and personnel at the inauguration ceremony, Sarma underscored the government's long-term strategy to modernise security infrastructure and enhance operational preparedness in view of evolving threats.

"These battalions will prepare Assam for emerging security challenges. Considering the evolving security scenario, we decided to strengthen our forces and enhance preparedness," the Chief Minister said.

Sarma recalled that upon assuming office in 2021, the government had resolved to expand the State's specialised security capabilities by establishing multiple new commando battalions.

"When I took office as Chief Minister in 2021, we decided to set up five new commando battalions. Earlier, Assam had only one commando battalion headquartered at Nandakata in Kamrup district," he said.

The new battalions are being strategically located across various districts to strengthen law enforcement reach, improve rapid response capacity and reinforce border security.

According to the Chief Minister, the



battalions have been set up or are under development at Dholcherra in Hailakandi district, Geleki in Sivasagar district, Pabhoi in Biswanath district and Doldoli in Karbi Anglong district. He noted that the 5th battalion at Pabhoi was inaugurated on October 4 last year, and the 6th battalion at Ambikapur now adds to the growing network.

around 400 commandos. The campus includes modern barracks, 149 housing quarters, parade grounds and drill facilities.

It also features a 10-bed medical centre and a primary school to cater to the needs of personnel and their families.

In addition, amenities such as namghars, ATMs and other essential facilities have been integrated within the premises to create a self-sustained campus environment.

Officials said the development reflects the State's emphasis not only on operational readiness but also on improving living standards for security personnel posted in remote areas.

Highlighting the broader security framework, the Chief Minister said the upcoming battalion at Diphu is

ready for inauguration, while construction work at other locations is progressing steadily.

He added that the battalion at Sadiya will play a crucial role in strengthening security in the sensitive border areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

"These initiatives will ensure better preparedness and stability in the region," Sarma said, reiterating the government's commitment to reinforcing internal security architecture amid changing security dynamics. The expansion of the commando battalions is seen as part of a larger push to modernise policing capabilities in Assam, with a focus on rapid deployment, counter-insurgency readiness and improved coordination in border districts.

Rs 54 Lakh PHC in Sribhumi Opens Once a Month, Triggers Allegations of Irregularities

SRIBHUMI:

A newly rebuilt Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Assam's Sribhumi district has come under sharp public scrutiny after it emerged that the facility, reconstructed at a sanctioned cost of ₹54.63,942, opens only once a month and reportedly receives no regular patients. The centre, located in the Mokamchhara area under the Ramkrishnanagar constituency, is now at the centre of allegations of administrative negligence and possible irregularities in the execution of government development funds. According to local residents, the PHC functions solely on the 4th of every month, and that too exclusively for administering routine vaccinations to children. For the rest of the month, the building remains locked, effectively denying the surrounding population access to basic healthcare services. Villagers claim that despite the allocation of over ₹54 lakh for reconstruction, the centre does not provide outpatient consultations, emergency care or routine medical services. "There is no doctor posted here. Only one nurse comes on vaccination day," a local resident alleged.

The absence of a full-time medical officer has reportedly rendered the facility non-functional for most practical purposes. Residents further allege that the physical condition of the building does not reflect the scale of the sanctioned amount. Broken window panes, poorly maintained rooms and a lack of essential infrastructure have raised questions about the quality of work executed.

Adding to concerns, the centre reportedly lacks even a signboard identifying it as a health facility, making it difficult for outsiders to recognise it as a functioning PHC. The construction of a toilet on the premises has also drawn criticism from locals, who argue that the facility remains largely unused, raising doubts about the rationale behind certain expenditures.

MHIP Seeks Repeal of Amended Marriage Law, Flags Safety and Identity Concerns for Mizo Women

AIZAWL

Mizo Hmeichhe Insuikhawm Pawl (MHIP), the largest women's organisation in Mizoram, has urged the state government to withdraw the recently passed amendment to the Mizo marriage and inheritance law, alleging that key provisions are inadequate and potentially unsafe for women of the community.

The appeal, issued on February 27, comes just days after the Mizoram Assembly passed the Mizo Marriage and Inheritance of Property (Amendment) Bill on February 24. The legislation, introduced to further codify Mizo customary laws, has since sparked sharp criticism from women's groups and legal observers, particularly over provisions concerning inter-community marriages.

In a statement, the MHIP expressed serious concern over a clause in the amended law that excludes Mizo women who marry non-tribal men from retaining their Mizo identity. According to the organisation, while the earlier legislation applied uniformly to all Mizo citizens including those who married

outside the community—the amended version creates a distinction that could have far-reaching social and legal consequences.

The women's body warned that the provision could adversely affect not only the women concerned but also their children, particularly in relation to inheritance and eligibility for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Under the amended law, if a Mizo woman marries a non-Mizo, she would cease to retain her Mizo identity, and her children would not be eligible to claim ST status. Critics argue that this effectively institutionalises gender discrimination by linking ethnic identity to marital choice in a way that disproportionately impacts women. The MHIP also claimed that despite being represented on the Mizo Customary Law Committee, it was neither consulted nor informed about specific provisions in the drafting of the Bill. The organisation said it has formally rejected the current version of the legislation and is now examining alternative legal frameworks to ensure stronger safeguards for women's rights and gender justice.

Garima Garg Welcomes Fast-Track Court Decision, Calls for Transparent and Fair Trial

GUWAHATI

Garima Garg on Friday welcomed the Assam Cabinet's decision to constitute a dedicated fast-track court for the day-to-day trial in the case related to the demise of cultural icon Zubeen Garg, asserting that justice must be delivered in a fair and transparent manner.

Reacting to the government's move, Garima Garg said the family had been seeking an expeditious hearing of the case and expressed satisfaction that the process was now moving towards a time-bound trial.

"We had wanted the case related to Zubeen Garg's incident to be heard expeditiously in a fast-track court. Everyone wanted this to happen. The SIT has filed the charge sheet within three months and has proceeded with the case properly," she said.

Emphasising the need for openness in the judicial process, Garima stated that a fair trial would ensure that the truth behind the incident comes to light.



"We already know who is guilty and how the incident occurred. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also mentioned that the incident was pre-planned. We want everything to come out in court with full transparency and for the culprit to receive strict punishment at the earliest," she said.

Maintaining that those responsible must be held account-

able, she added that no one who admired and respected Zubeen Garg would want the accused to be granted bail. She expressed hope that the judiciary would treat the matter with due seriousness.

"I hope the court will handle the matter with sincerity and fairness. Those responsible must now be punished," she said.

On Thursday, the Chief Minister announced that the State gov-

ernment would formally request the Gauhati High Court to constitute an exclusive sessions court under Section 346(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita to conduct daily hearings in the case. "The Cabinet has approved the formation of a dedicated court for the day-to-day trial of the case. We will place a request before the Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court. Thereafter, the Chief Justice will take a decision on the constitution of the court and the proceedings," Sarma said. As per the Cabinet decision, the High Court will appoint a judge and issue the necessary guidelines for the functioning of the special court. The State government has assured that it will provide all required logistical and infrastructural support to ensure the smooth conduct of proceedings. The move to establish a fast-track court is aimed at expediting the trial and ensuring that the case is heard on a daily basis, reflecting the public interest and sensitivity surrounding the matter.

Daklane Government School in Kohima Upgraded to High School After 72 Years

KOHIMA

Marking a major milestone in its long academic journey, Daklane Government School in Kohima was officially upgraded to a Government High School (GHS) on February 27, 72 years after it was first established in 1954.

The institution, one of the oldest educational establishments in the State capital of Kohima, had been functioning as Government Middle School (GMS) Daklane, offering classes from VI to VIII. With the latest upgradation, students will now be able to continue their education up to Class X within the same campus.

The school was initially founded in 1954 and later upgraded to a middle school in 2002. The elevation to high school status addresses a long-pending demand of residents in Daklane colony, who had sought

the introduction of secondary-level education facilities within the locality.

The upgradation is expected to ease the burden on students and parents by reducing the need to travel to other parts of the city for higher classes.

Attending the ceremony, Nagaland Minister for Women Resource Development and Horticulture Salthoutouuo Kruse described the occasion as an auspicious day for the town. She noted that Daklane Government School is among the oldest schools in Kohima and said its elevation to high school status was a long-felt necessity, especially considering the colony's central location.

Kruse underscored the importance of strengthening government schools, stating that they play a critical role in providing accessible and free education to students

from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

She highlighted that government institutions offer qualified teachers and enable students to pursue quality education close to home while remaining competitive in a rapidly evolving world.

The minister also credited the State government led by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio for implementing initiatives aimed at improving educational infrastructure across Nagaland.

Calling education an investment in the future, Kruse urged students to make the most of the expanded academic opportunities and encouraged teachers to shoulder their responsibilities with sincerity and dedication.

Advisor for School Education and SCERT, Dr Kekhrihoulie Yhume, described the upgradation as a new beginning for the institu-

tion and part of broader efforts to revitalise government schools in the State.

He stressed the need to transform public perception regarding government educational institutions, observing that many families - including those from economically weaker sections - often prefer private schools due to prevailing attitudes.

According to school officials, the newly upgraded high school has enrolled 22 students in Class IX for the 2026 academic session, raising the total student strength to 204. The institution is currently supported by 24 teachers, strengthening its capacity to deliver secondary-level education in the heart of Kohima. The development is expected to enhance educational access in the locality and reinforce the State's commitment to improving public education infrastructure.

Assam Governor Attends 'Nation First Programme' at Narangi Military Station



GUWAHATI

The "Nation First Programme" was organised at Narangi Military Station in Guwahati on Thursday under the aegis of Headquarters 51 Sub Area, bringing together members of the armed forces and civil society to promote patriotism and national integration.

Assam Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya attended the event as the chief guest and addressed the gathering on the theme "Nation First", emphasising unity, dedication and collective responsibility in strengthening the country.

A key highlight of the programme was a detailed presentation on "Operation Sindoor", showcased as a case study of effective civil-military liaison. The presentation underscored coordinated efforts between the civil administration and the Indian Army in serving national interests.

The Governor also felicitated distinguished civil and military personnel for their ex-

emplary contributions towards nation-building, recognising their service and commitment.

The event featured a weapon display organised by the Indian Army, demonstrating its operational readiness and technological advancements. The exhibition drew keen interest from attendees, offering insights into the Army's modern capabilities and preparedness.

The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation from Army personnel, cadets of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) and volunteers of the National Service Scheme (NSS), reflecting a strong spirit of patriotism among the youth.

Organisers said the event reaffirmed the shared resolve of the armed forces and civil society to work together towards the nation's security, development and unity. The gathering concluded with a renewed pledge to uphold the principles of national integration and collective responsibility under the overarching theme of "Nation First."

Vrindabani Vastra Is a Living Spiritual Imagination, Not Just Art: T. Richard Blurton

GUWAHATI

Internationally acclaimed archaeologist T. Richard Blurton has underscored that Assam's historic Vrindabani Vastra must be understood not merely as an artistic treasure, but as a profound expression of collective faith, memory and narrative imagination shaped over centuries.

Speaking at an academic interaction in Guwahati, Blurton - former Head of the South and South East Asia Section at the British Museum - urged scholars to situate the textile within a broader global and civilisational framework, rather than viewing it solely through the lens of art history.

Describing the Vrindabani Vastra as "more than a work of art," Blurton said it embodies a layered cultural imagination rooted in devotion, craftsmanship and community participation.

He emphasised that the textile reflects the interconnectedness of religion, storytelling and social life in pre-modern Assam. "Such objects are not isolated artefacts; they are part of a living continuum of belief and shared experience," he noted.



The Vrindabani Vastra, a 16th-century woven textile traditionally associated with the Vaishnavite reformer Srimanta Sankardeva, depicts episodes from sacred narratives linked to Lord Krishna.

Blurton highlighted how the bastra serves as both a visual scripture and a community project, integrating theology, aesthetics and social organisation.

According to Blurton, the textile illustrates how devotional movements in Assam shaped not just spiritual life but also artistic production and social cohesion. He observed that the Vaishnavite tradition founded by Sankardeva cultivated a participatory culture in which art, performance and worship were deeply intertwined.

By embedding sacred stories within

intricate woven imagery, the Vrindabani Vastra became a medium for transmitting values and beliefs across generations. It reflects how societies communicate identity and collective memory through material culture.

Blurton further noted that heritage objects such as the Vastra provide critical insight into how communities articulate philosophical ideas through tangible forms.

"These artefacts reveal how imagination and faith can be woven together - literally and metaphorically," he remarked.

Positioning the textile within a wider South and Southeast Asian devotional tradition, Blurton stressed that Assam's artistic heritage deserves greater engagement in international scholarship.

He argued that regional traditions must be studied as integral parts of global cultural history. He called for deeper academic collaboration, documentation and conservation efforts to ensure that such heritage continues to be preserved and meaningfully interpreted. Heritage, he said, is not static but evolves through reinterpretation and sustained community engagement.

The interaction sparked discussions on material culture, sacred traditions and artistic expression, with participants exploring how textiles, performance and ritual practices continue to shape Assam's cultural iden-

tity.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Nani Gopal Mahanta reflected on the enduring legacy of Sankardeva, noting that institutions such as the Naamghar and performance traditions like Ankiya Bhaona represent a synthesis of devotion, philosophy and art that continues to influence Assamese society.

Scholars present at the session observed that the Vrindabani Vastra bridges the past and the present by transmitting spiritual and ethical values across generations, reaffirming Assam's place within the broader history of devotional art.

Blurton's remarks come at a time of renewed institutional focus on preserving the textile. On February 22, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma laid the foundation stone for a Cultural Museum Project in Khanapara that will house the much-anticipated 500-year-old sacred Vrindabani Vastra.

"I believe within 1.5 years we will complete the construction," Sarma said following the bhoomi poojan ceremony.

As Assam moves to institutionalise the preservation of this iconic textile, Blurton's intervention has added a crucial scholarly dimension - reminding audiences that the Vrindabani Vastra is not only an artistic marvel but also a living testament to the region's spiritual imagination and collective cultural consciousness.

Quest!

Four is the only number that has the same number of letters as its actual value.



Ready for narco test to bring out truth of POCSO case: Swami Avimuktेश्वaranand



LUCKNOW

Swami Avimuktेश्वaranand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Jyotirpeeth, on Friday said he was willing to undergo a narco analysis test if it helped establish the truth in the sexual abuse case registered against him under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Speaking to the media at his Shrividy Mathh Ashram in Varanasi, the seer said, "If the truth can be ascertained through a narco test, it should certainly be done. Whatever methods are available to uncover the truth should be adopted."

The case against him has been filed under the POCSO Act and relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Avimuktेश्वaranand has termed the allegations "false", claiming they were aimed at defaming him and diverting attention from the globally discussed "Epstein files".

Meanwhile, the Allahabad High Court reserved the order on the seer's anticipatory bail plea on Friday saying there

would be a stay on his arrest till the order was delivered.

Meanwhile, police arrested a law student, Ajit Kumar Saroj, who had allegedly threatened to blow up the Shankaracharya's lawyer, Srinath Tripathi, with a bomb. Saroj was held from Rasipur village in the Jansa police station area within 20 hours after the threat was issued. Police said he practised in the Varanasi court.

According to Sanjay Pandey, a disciple of the seer, Avimuktेश्वaranand continued with his routine religious activities and performed his daily prayers as usual.

Avimuktेश्वaranand said his lawyers were present in court and would place all evidence before it.

"Falsehood does not last long. Those who fabricated a false story are being exposed. As people come to know about this concocted case, the truth will become clear," he said.

Questioning claims linked to medical examination reports, Pandey said:

"How can a medical report establish our involvement? It is being said that the report has proved misconduct. That may be someone's statement, but what meaning does a medical report conducted after so many days carry?"

He added that even if any wrongdoing had occurred, it would not automatically establish who was responsible. "The child who never came to us cannot be easily linked to our name," he said.

The seer also alleged that the children were staying with the complainant, Ashutosh Brahmachari, and questioned why they were not sent to a juvenile home. He referred to media reports claiming that the children were kept at a hotel in Hardoi and alleged that they were not allowed to meet mediapersons.

He further accused the police of shielding the complainant and preparing statements against him. "No matter how elaborate the fabrication, the truth will eventually come out," he said.

Will quit politics if BJP wins even 10 seats': Kejriwal dares PM Modi to hold fresh Delhi polls after clean chit



NEW DELHI

Hours after the Rouse Avenue Court on Friday dismissed the CBI chargesheet in the Delhi Excise Policy 'scam' case, Aam Aadmi Party National Convener Arvind Kejriwal challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to call fresh elections in the national capital.

He further said that he will quit politics if the ruling party wins more than 10 seats.

Addressing a press briefing at the party headquarters, the AAP chief slammed the BJP, claiming that they hatched a conspiracy after seeing that the people of Delhi were happy with the party's work and that it could not be defeated.

"They knew the people of Delhi were happy with our work and that they had no ground to stand on when it came to the politics of performance. So they hatched a conspiracy," he said.

"The public knows that Kejriwal is honest, so they attacked my honesty. The public knows that the Aam Aadmi Party is honest, so they targeted the party's integrity," he added.

He further said that the BJP conspired to finish off AAP by claiming that "Kejriwal is dishonest".

"They accused me of a liquor scam, of taking money, of siphoning off Rs 100 crore. I have earned nothing in my life except honesty and respect. I have not earned a single illegal penny. I am not like them," he said, adding that he has

earned only honesty, and that is what the BJP wanted to destroy.

The AAP Supremo said that for the past four years, the ED, the CBI and all central agencies were used to level what was called a liquor scam against the party. "The CBI and the ED filed charge sheets in the case. Today, the court had to decide prima facie whether there was sufficient material, based on evidence and witness statements, to even run a trial. The trial had not begun yet. The court only had to decide whether there was enough material to proceed with a trial," he said.

He added that in its nearly 600-page order, the court said there was not even an "iota of evidence" or "credible witness statements" to justify putting the

case on trial, after examining all the evidence and statements presented before it.

Kejriwal further claimed that the entire conspiracy was jointly hatched by PM Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

When the judgment was pronounced earlier, an emotional Kejriwal spoke with visible tears in his eyes. He said he had earned nothing but honesty in his public life, calling the entire case fabricated. He further added that in the end, injustice and wrongdoing are defeated, and truth alone prevails.

Aam Aadmi Party National Convener Arvind Kejriwal addressing a press briefing at the party headquarters.

Kejriwal said that for the past several years, the BJP had repeatedly levelled allegations of a liquor scam against him and his colleagues, but on Friday, the court rejected all those charges and acquitted every accused in the case.

"We have always said that truth triumphs. We have faith in the Indian judicial system. I express my heartfelt gratitude to the learned judge who delivered justice to us. Truth has won. I have always said that God is with us," he affirmed.

The Delhi court discharged Kejriwal, his former deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others in the Delhi excise policy case, refusing to take cognisance of the CBI's chargesheet over lack of evidence and serious gaps in the probe.

The Rouse Avenue Court also ordered a departmental inquiry against the investigating officer, making strong observations on the manner in which the investigation was conducted.

Soon after the ruling, AAP termed the order a decisive setback to the prosecution's case, asserting that the court had effectively rejected the prosecution's narrative.

INTERNATIONAL

US allows non-emergency embassy staff to leave Israel as Trump threatens Iran strikes

PARIS

The United States authorised the departure of non-emergency embassy staff from Israel on Friday, as it threatened strikes on Iran and pressed its biggest military build-up in the Middle East in decades.

The move came a day after a round of Oman-mediated talks between Iran and the US seen as a last-ditch bid to avert war, though initial optimism was tempered by Tehran warning Washington must drop "excessive demands" to reach a deal.

The talks follow repeated threats from President Donald Trump to strike Iran while the US military builds up its forces in the region.

As the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, was due to arrive off the coast of key US ally Israel, the US embassy in the country announced it was allowing non-emergency government personnel and family members to leave "due to safety risks".

"Persons may wish to consider leaving Israel while commercial flights are available," the embassy said on its website.

The New York Times reported that US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee sent an email to embassy staff on Friday morning saying that those wishing to leave "should do so TODAY".

"Focus on getting a seat to anyplace from which you can then continue travel to DC, but the first priority will be getting expeditiously out of country," he was quoted as writing.

Trump on February 19 gave Iran 15 days to reach a deal, and while Iran has insisted the discussions focus solely on its nuclear programme, the US wants Tehran's missile programme and its support for militant groups curtailed.



The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday that Trump's negotiating team would demand that Iran dismantle its three main nuclear sites and hand over all its remaining enriched uranium to the United States.

Without specifying what demands he was referring to, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Friday that "success in this path requires seriousness and realism from the other side and avoidance of any miscalculation and excessive demands".

Following the talks in Geneva on Thursday, Araghchi told state TV that the negotiations "made very good progress and entered into the elements of an agreement very seriously, both in the nuclear field and in the sanctions field".

He said the next round would take place in "perhaps less than a week", with technical talks at the UN's nuclear agency to begin in Vienna on Monday. Omani Foreign Minister Badr

Albusaidi also announced technical discussions were to be held next week in Vienna.

"We have finished the day after significant progress in the negotiation between the United States and Iran," he said in a post on X.

Araghchi, in a post on X, called the latest round of talks "the most intense so far".

"It concluded with the mutual understanding that we will continue to engage in a more detailed manner on matters that are essential to any deal - including sanctions termination and nuclear-related steps," he wrote.

UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi joined the negotiations, a source close to the talks told.

Trump said in his State of the Union address this week that Iran had "already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America".

China, Russia call on Pakistan, Afghanistan to halt hostilities



BEIJING

Amid escalating hostilities between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Russia and China on Friday called for an immediate halt to the fighting and a diplomatic resolution.

China urged both the nations to work out a ceasefire while expressing concern over the escalation of the conflict between the two countries.

China is closely following the developments of the situation in the conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here, responding to questions on the current conflict between the two countries.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are close neighbours, and both are neighbouring countries of China. As a neighbour and friend, China is deeply concerned about the escalation of the conflict and deeply saddened by the casualties caused by the conflict, Mao said.

She said China supports combating all forms of terrorism and calls on both sides to exercise calm and restraint, properly resolve their differences and disputes through dialogue and consultation, and realise a ceasefire as soon

as possible to avoid more suffering.

The de-escalation serves the fundamental interests of the two countries and peoples, and will help uphold peace and stability in the region, she said.

She also said China has been mediating between the two countries through its own channels and stands ready to continue to play a constructive role in de-escalating the situation and improving relations between the two countries, Mao said.

In response to a question on whether China is considering evacuating Chinese nationals and companies from Pakistan and Afghanistan or suspending relevant flights due to the fierce cross-border clashes between the two countries, Mao said, "We are closely following the development of the situation and will provide necessary assistance to Chinese nationals in need."

China maintains close ties with Pakistan and Afghanistan through a tripartite mechanism, conducting periodic meetings to iron out differences over Islamabad's repeated allegations against Kabul of hosting Pakistan's militant groups, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Baloch Liberation Army.

The Afghan Taliban firmly reject the allegations of harbouring Pakistani militants and blame the Pakistani army's aggressive actions, including airstrikes on Kabul, for the escalation of the conflict.

Russia also urged both countries to end the conflict and resolve their differences through diplomatic means.

The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed concern over the "sharp escalation" of armed clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan, "involving regular army units, air force, and heavy weapons".

"There are casualties on both sides, including civilians. We call on our friendly countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to abandon this dangerous confrontation and return to the negotiating table to resolve all differences through political and diplomatic means," foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

Kremlin's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, also urged Islamabad and Kabul to halt the hostilities.

"We are in favour of a swift end to mutual attacks and a diplomatic resolution of differences," Kabulov was quoted as saying by state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

Northeast India's Silent Inequality: When Social Justice Becomes a Calendar Footnote

On February 20 each year, the world pauses—at least symbolically—to reflect on fairness, dignity and equal opportunity. The date marks the United Nations' observance of the World Day of Social Justice. Across continents, governments issue statements, civil society hosts discussions, and institutions revisit their commitments to equality and inclusion. In Northeast India, however, the day passes with scarcely a whisper.

The silence is not merely ceremonial. It is symptomatic.

For a region that has long narrated its own marginalization within the Indian Union, Northeast India's collective indifference to social justice as a structured public priority is deeply paradoxical. While the language of rights and identity is frequently invoked in political discourse, the systematic pursuit of social justice—through policy, public education and institutional reform—remains sporadic, fragmented and often reactive.

Beyond a Slogan: What Social Justice Actually Means

Social justice is not a fashionable catchphrase nor a charitable impulse. The United Nations defines it as "an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations." In practical terms, it demands equitable access to rights, opportunities and resources regardless of caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability or economic status.

Its foundational principles—equity, participation, inclusion, access, diversity and human rights—are not abstract ideals. They are measurable commitments. They imply that marginalized communities must not only be protected but empowered; that policies must not merely exist on paper but actively dismantle systemic barriers; and that dignity must be embedded in governance, not left to personal goodwill.

Historically, the term "social justice" was articulated in the 19th century by Italian thinker Luigi Taparelli, who argued that poor and disenfranchised people should be treated with equal moral and civic consideration. Over time, the idea expanded to encompass movements for civil rights, gender equality, labour protections and environmental justice.

In contemporary global politics, social justice frameworks inform movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and School Strike for Climate. Each addresses structural inequities—racial discrimination, gender-based violence, climate injustice—through collective action.

The Northeast, by contrast, rarely frames its struggles in this integrated language of systemic reform.

The Irony of a Marginalized Region Forgetting Justice

The eight Northeastern states—Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim—have historically protested economic neglect, infrastructural deficits and political underrepresentation at the national level. The region's leaders often speak of development gaps, inadequate connectivity and policy blind spots emanating from New Delhi.

Yet within the region itself, structural inequities persist and deepen—along lines of tribe, clan, gender, language, religion and economic class. Social justice, when discussed, is often reduced to identity-based mobilization rather than holistic equity.

The failure to officially observe the World Day of Social Justice is not the central problem. It is simply illustrative. A government that does not symbolically recognize the day is unlikely to institutionalize its spirit.

From Communal Equity to Market Inequality

Many tribal societies of the Northeast were historically characterized by subsistence economies and relatively egalitarian social arrangements. Land, labour and resources were often communally managed. Social prestige was linked to community contribution rather than accumulation.

However, with the expansion of market economies, private property regimes, bureaucratic governance and electoral competition, disparities widened. Wealth stratification, urban-rural divides and access-based

privilege have reshaped once-cohesive communities.

Urban centres



like Guwahati, Imphal and Shillong increasingly display stark contrasts: gated enclaves alongside informal settlements; elite private schooling alongside under-resourced government institutions; thriving commercial districts adjacent to unemployed youth populations.

The shift from subsistence equity to aspirational capitalism has not been accompanied by robust redistributive policies. Instead, it has normalized inequality.

Education: The Missed Catalyst
Education remains one of the most powerful instruments for social justice. It equips citizens with knowledge, critical thinking and civic awareness. It can dismantle prejudice, empower women and minorities, and foster environmental responsibility.

Yet across much of India, including the Northeast, access to quality education remains uneven. Rural schools often struggle with inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages and limited digital connectivity. Higher education remains financially out of reach for many. Even when accessible, curricula rarely foreground social justice as a lived civic ethic.

Education in the region often emphasizes examination success over ethical citizenship. Students learn to compete, not necessarily to empathize.

Without embedding equity, constitutional rights and social responsibility into mainstream pedagogy, generations graduate with professional ambitions but limited understanding of systemic injustice.

Gender, Violence and Institutional Silence

One of the gravest global social justice concerns is violence—physical, psychological and structural. Gender-based violence, in particular, continues to scar Indian society. The Northeast is not immune, even though certain communities have matrilineal traditions.

Incidents of ethnic conflict, inter-community clashes and insurgency-related violence have historically affected several Northeastern states. Women and minorities often bear disproportionate burdens in such crises—displacement, economic insecurity and trauma.

Yet social justice discourse in the region seldom moves beyond episodic outrage. Sustained institutional reform—police accountability, gender-sensitive governance, survivor-centered support systems—remains inconsistent.

When violence becomes normalized, justice becomes reactive rather than preventive.

Identity Politics Versus Structural Justice

The Northeast has witnessed numerous identity-based mobilizations—ethnic autonomy movements, language preservation campaigns and demands for constitutional safeguards. These are legitimate struggles rooted in historical grievances.

However, identity politics can sometimes overshadow intra-community inequalities. A marginalized tribe may still marginalize its own women. A community fighting for autonomy may ignore economic stratification within its ranks. A linguistic minority may overlook disability rights.

True social justice requires intersectionality—an understanding that caste, ethnicity, gender, class and ability intersect. It demands that movements look inward as well as outward.

Without this introspection, justice becomes selective.

The Climate Justice Dimension
The Northeast is ecologically fragile and disproportionately affected by floods, landslides and deforestation. Yet those least responsible for environmental degradation often suffer its worst consequences.

Climate justice—a principle recognizing that wealthier, industrialized

discussions remain confined to activist circles, lacking broader civic engagement.

Civic Apathy and the Empathy Deficit

Perhaps the most troubling obstacle is societal indifference. Many citizens who belong to geographically and economically marginalized backgrounds fail to recognize their own vulnerability within unjust systems.

Ignorance of rights, limited civil society organization, underutilization of digital advocacy and reluctance to participate in peaceful mobilization all contribute to stagnation.

Social media, while widely used for entertainment and political commentary, is seldom harnessed for sustained justice campaigns. Volunteerism and public-interest litigation remain limited in scale compared to the magnitude of issues.

In essence, empathy is underdeveloped as a civic habit.

Constitutional and Moral Obligations

India's Constitution enshrines justice—social, economic and political—as a foundational promise. Governments, therefore, carry both legal and moral responsibility to advance equity.

For Northeastern administrations, this means more than implementing central schemes. It requires region-specific strategies: equitable land policies, inclusive urban planning, minority language protections, disability access frameworks, gender-responsive budgeting and transparent welfare delivery.

It also means commemorating and internalizing global observances like the World Day of Social Justice—not as token gestures, but as annual accountability checkpoints.

Reclaiming the Narrative

The Northeast often positions itself as a periphery struggling for recognition. Yet within that periphery lie multiple internal peripheries—women in conflict zones, rural youth without employment pathways, displaced

communities, religious minorities, persons with disabilities and economically marginalized clans.

If social justice remains forgotten, these internal peripheries will deepen.

Reviving justice as a public priority demands collective action:

1. Governmental Accountability: Institutionalize annual equity audits and publicly report progress.

2. Educational Reform: Integrate social justice frameworks into curricula across levels.

3. Civil Society Mobilization: Strengthen grassroots organizations beyond episodic activism.

4. Media Responsibility: Expand coverage of structural inequality, not just political drama.

5. Citizen Engagement: Encourage volunteering, public consultations and participatory governance.

Remembering Before It Is Too Late

Forgetting a commemorative day may seem inconsequential. But forgetting the principle it represents risks normalizing injustice.

Northeast India's history is marked by resilience and assertion of identity. Translating that resilience into structured social justice movements could redefine the region's trajectory—not merely as a claimant of national attention, but as a model of inclusive governance.

If governments continue to treat social justice as peripheral, and citizens remain complacent, the region may gradually forget not only the World Day of Social Justice but the very idea of justice as a shared civic duty.

In a land once defined by communal equity, reclaiming social justice is not a radical demand. It is a return to foundational values—adapted to modern realities.

The silence of February 20 should not become the silence of conscience.

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