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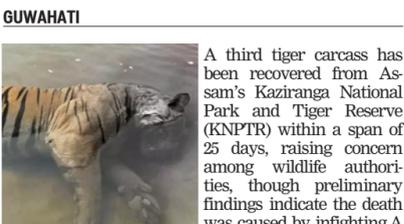
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**PERSPECTIVE**  
If you stay, stay forever. If you go, do it today. If you change, change for the better. If you talk, make sure you mean what you say.

### Third tiger found dead in Kaziranga in 25 days; infighting suspected



A third tiger carcass has been recovered from Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) within a span of 25 days, raising concern among wildlife authorities, though preliminary findings indicate the death was caused by infighting. A senior KNPTR official said

the carcass of a male tiger, estimated to be around 12 to 13 years old, was found on Saturday in the Buraphar Range near the Mandir Baneshwar Anti-Poaching Camp (APC) area at Ghorakati. Following the recovery, KNPTR Director Sonali Ghosh constituted a committee to conduct a post-mortem examination and ensure disposal of the carcass in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the official said.

"Preliminary findings of the post-mortem suggest that infighting may have led to the death of the tiger," the official added, noting that further analysis is underway to rule out other causes.

The latest incident comes close on the heels of two similar cases reported in January. On January 18, the carcass of a tigress aged around three to four years was recovered from the Kathpora area of the Bagori Western Range, with post-mortem findings also pointing to death due to infighting.

**WHO SAID WHAT**



**"I am happy to announce that India's UPI will come to Malaysia soon" ~ Narendra Modi, PM India**

# Assam Cabinet hands over Gogoi 'Pakistan links' probe to MHA, cites national security

**GUWAHATI**

The Assam Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, on Saturday decided to transfer the investigation into Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's alleged links with Pakistan to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), saying the matter involved serious national security implications beyond the remit of the state government.

Announcing the decision after a Cabinet meeting, Sarma said the move followed detailed deliberations by ministers after a Special Investigation Team (SIT) submitted its findings in a case linked to Ali Tauqueer. The Chief Minister stressed that the inquiry was being pursued from a national security standpoint, with political considerations remaining secondary.

"The Cabinet discussed the SIT report at length. Based on the nature of the materials collected and the limitations faced by a state-level agency, it was felt that the investigation must now be taken forward under the guidance of the Ministry of Home Affairs," Sarma told reporters.

The Chief Minister said the SIT, constituted earlier by the Assam government, had gathered sensitive inputs and documents from



multiple sources during the course of its probe. However, the team concluded that further investigation would require international cooperation, including the involvement of Interpol, as well as access to classified information held by the Government of India and Parliament. "At a certain stage, it becomes impossible for a state agency to proceed on its own," Sarma said. "Issues of this nature require central

oversight, access to national databases and, if necessary, coordination with international agencies."

He said the Cabinet had therefore decided to act strictly in accordance with the advice of the MHA. The Union Home Ministry will now decide which central agency will take over the case, following which the Assam government will formally hand over all records and materials related to the investigation.

Sarma also announced that he would present a detailed briefing on the current status of the case and the findings of the SIT at a press conference scheduled for Sunday at 10:30 am.

Responding to questions on the political sensitivities surrounding the issue, the Chief Minister referred to a 2012 visit by Gaurav Gogoi to Pakistan. He claimed that at the time neither the Assam Police nor the Assam Special Branch had been informed of the visit, and that even the Government of India had no prior intimation.

"If my son were to visit Pakistan, I would inform the External Affairs Minister. That is the normal protocol," Sarma said, adding that even domestic travel by close family members is generally communicated through official channels. "Such visits, given the nature of our relationship with that country, cannot be

treated casually." Reiterating that the matter transcended state jurisdiction, Sarma said the Cabinet's decision was guided solely by security considerations.

"This is not about politics. It is about issues that have implications for national security, and those must be examined at the appropriate level," he said.

In a separate development, the Chief Minister announced that the Assam Police would register a case suo motu against senior Congress leader and former Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Bhupen Bora over allegations of indecent behaviour during a public rally. Sarma said he had directed the Director General of Police (DGP) to ensure that the matter was taken up strictly in accordance with the law.

"The police have been instructed to proceed without delay and without any external pressure," the Chief Minister said, adding that the law would take its own course.

The Cabinet decisions come amid an intensifying political confrontation between the ruling BJP in Assam and the Congress, with both sides trading allegations ahead of a series of organisational and electoral milestones in the state.

## FNTA pact marks beginning of administrative journey towards eastern Nagaland statehood: ENPO

**DIMAPUR**

The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) on Saturday described the signing of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) agreement as the first major step towards its long-standing demand for a separate State for eastern Nagaland.

Addressing a civic reception organised in honour of the ENPO leadership at the Konyak Morung, ENPO president A Chingmak Chang said the agreement should be seen not as a final settlement but as the start of a new administrative phase for the region.

"This is not the end of the road. It is the beginning of an administrative journey," Chang said, stressing that the success of the new arrangement would depend on unity among the eight tribes inhabiting eastern Nagaland.

He underlined that meaningful development in the region would only be possible if all communities worked collectively, adding that the historic agreement was the result of sustained public aspiration and collective resolve. "The credit goes to each and every citizen of eastern Nagaland," he said, while appealing to tribal bodies and civil society groups to remain united as the proposed authority takes shape.

Clarifying ENPO's position, Chang said the FNTA model was not the organisation's original demand but a proposal put forward by the Government of India. He said ENPO agreed to the arrangement as it broadly aligned with the aspirations of the people and provided a concrete framework for administrative empowerment.

He also reiterated that the FNTA would function within the State of Nagaland and

would not alter existing state boundaries.

The tripartite agreement, signed on Thursday by the Centre, the Nagaland Government and the ENPO, provides for the creation of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority covering six districts-Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak and Shamator. Under the agreement, powers over 46 subjects will be devolved to the new authority, granting it enhanced administrative and financial autonomy.

The FNTA is envisioned as a dedicated institutional mechanism to address long-standing governance gaps, infrastructure deficits and development challenges in eastern Nagaland, a region that has consistently flagged issues of neglect and under-representation.

The ENPO, which represents eight tribes across the six eastern districts, has been pressing for separate Statehood since 2010, citing decades of economic and administrative marginalisation. While the demand for full Statehood remains unchanged, the organisation later agreed to consider the Centre's proposal for an autonomous administrative authority as an interim step.

Officials said the next phase would involve framing operational guidelines, defining institutional structures and ensuring effective devolution of funds and powers to the FNTA.

Eastern Nagaland has witnessed widespread public mobilisation over the years in support of greater autonomy, including election boycotts and protests. The signing of the FNTA agreement is being viewed as a significant political development aimed at addressing these long-standing grievances through a negotiated framework.

### Manipur CM reviews integrated farming plan to revive state economy

**IMPHAL**

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Saturday chaired a high-level review meeting to chart a roadmap for the state's economic revival through the promotion of the Integrated Farming System (IFS), with a focus on sustainable and diversified agriculture.

The meeting, held at the Cabinet Hall of the Chief Minister's Secretariat, examined ways to harness Manipur's agricultural and horticultural potential to accelerate economic recovery. The Chief Minister directed concerned departments to actively encourage alternative crop cultivation and allied agricultural activities, particularly in the hill districts, to enhance farmers' incomes and strengthen rural livelihoods.

Officials discussed measures to integrate farming with animal husbandry, fisheries and horticulture, with the aim of ensuring efficient use of resources and reducing vulnerability to climate and market fluctuations. The review also explored opportunities for exporting agricultural and horticultural produce, with emphasis on value addition and improved market linkages as drivers of growth.

Singh said integrated farming could play a key role in the state's long-term economic revival by generating employment, increasing productivity and promoting balanced development across both hill and valley regions.

The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Dr Puneet Kumar Goel, Additional Chief Secretary Vivek Kumar Dewangan, Commissioner to the Chief Minister N. Ashok Kumar, Director of Horticulture and Soil Conservation K. Devdutta Sharma, Director of Agriculture Peter Salam, and other senior officials.

## Nipah virus situation under control, vigilance essential: ICMR chair



**GUWAHATI**

Amid reports of Nipah virus cases from different parts of the country, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) chairperson Dr Rajni Kant on Saturday said the situation is not alarming at present but stressed the need for heightened precautions in affected States.

Speaking to The Assam Tribune, Dr Kant said Nipah infections have largely been reported from Kerala and West Bengal, adding that timely preventive measures could effectively curb the spread of the virus.

"The disease can be prevented from spreading if adequate precautions are taken," he said, pointing to Kerala's prompt isolation of infected patients as an effective containment measure.

He advised all States to remain alert and ensure immediate isolation and contact tracing if any suspected case is detected.

Explaining the transmission pattern, Dr Kant said the Nipah virus is primarily carried by bats. Humans can become infected by consuming fruits partially eaten by bats, following which the virus can spread through human-to-human contact.

He said the infection typically causes respiratory tract symptoms, accompanied by high fever and body ache. "At present, there is no vaccine available to fight Nipah virus," he added.

Dr Kant also addressed concerns related to Covid-19, stating that while the virus continues to circulate, its impact has significantly reduced due to widespread vaccination and repeated exposure among the population.

"People are still getting infected and may develop fever, but severe cases requiring intensive care are no longer being reported," he said.

Responding to queries about a possible link between Covid-19 vaccination and an increase in heart attacks, particularly among young people, Dr Kant categorically ruled out vaccines as a cause.

"The ICMR has conducted detailed studies, and it is confirmed that Covid vaccines are safe and have nothing to do with heart attacks," he said. However, he added that further research is needed to determine whether Covid infection itself has any long-term role in cardiac events.

## Son Beel Utsav 2.0 kicks off in Sribhumi, celebrating Barak Valley's nature and folk heritage

**SILCHAR**

Anandapur village in Sribhumi district came alive with colour and cultural vibrancy on Saturday as Son Beel Utsav 2.0 commenced, marking a renewed effort to showcase the Barak Valley's rich ecological wealth and folk traditions on a wider national platform.

Located near the expansive Son Beel wetland, the village wore a festive look, reflecting the growing excitement around the event, which aims to highlight one of the largest wetlands in North East India and its immense ecological and tourism potential.

Conceived as an initiative of Assam University, Silchar, the festival is part of a sustained push to place Son Beel on the national and international tourism map. Building on the success of the inaugural edition held in 2024, this year's festival has been strengthened with Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai, joining as a partner institution. The event is being supported by the North Eastern Council (NEC) and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

According to a release issued by Assam University, the festival was formally inaugurated by former Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha (Retd), Chancellor of the university,



who attended the programme as the chief guest. The inaugural ceremony was also attended by Assam University Vice-Chancellor Prof Rajive Mohan Pant and Rabindranath Tagore University Vice-Chancellor Prof Manabendra Dutta Choudhury, along with senior academicians and administrators, including Assam University Registrar

Dr Pradosh Kiran Nath and Rabindranath Tagore University Academic Registrar Dr Sandip Ratna.

Following the inauguration, the festival featured a day-long programme of folk dance and folk music competitions, cultural performances, book releases and prize distribution ceremonies. A mix of local performers and

invited artistes presented a wide range of cultural expressions, reflecting the diversity of the Barak Valley.

Speaking on the occasion, Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Arup Raha said Son Beel stood out among India's many wetlands as a "jewel of the North East," deserving national and global recognition for its biodiversity, cultural vibrancy and tourism potential. He expressed confidence that the combined efforts of Assam University and Rabindranath Tagore University would help transform Son Beel into a major tourism destination while improving the socio-economic conditions of local communities. Echoing similar views, Prof Manabendra Dutta Choudhury said Son Beel has the potential to emerge as a key driver of socio-economic development in southern Assam, particularly through sustainable tourism and community-based initiatives. Prof Rajive Mohan Pant, recalling his first visit to the wetland, described Son Beel as a place of exceptional natural beauty deeply intertwined with local cultural traditions. He said the Son Beel Utsav is an effort to present this unique blend of ecology and heritage to a global audience, positioning the wetland as a symbol of harmony between nature and culture.

## Conrad Sangma lays foundation stone for 10-bedded integrated AYUSH hospital in Merengipara

**SHILLONG**

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma on Friday laid the foundation stone for a 10-bedded Integrated AYUSH Hospital at Merengipara in South West Garo Hills district, marking a significant step towards strengthening healthcare services in remote and border areas of the state.

The hospital is being established under the National AYUSH Mission and has been approved for the 2025-26 financial year with an outlay of ₹7 crore. Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said the project reflects the government's commitment to decentralising healthcare and improving access to medical services in rural regions.

Sangma informed that 35 new posts, including AYUSH doctors, nurses and yoga instructors, have been proposed for the facility. He said the hospital would provide much-needed inpatient services, filling a long-standing gap in healthcare delivery in the area, while also

focusing on de-addiction, youth wellness and holistic treatment.

"A healthy youth forms the foundation of a strong Meghalaya," the Chief Minister said, adding that the integrated hospital would promote traditional systems of medicine alongside modern healthcare practices and indigenous knowledge.

The Chief Minister noted that the hospital would cater not only to residents of Merengipara but also to surrounding areas. He urged the local community to take ownership of the facility and ensure its effective utilisation.

Highlighting broader development initiatives in the constituency, Sangma acknowledged improvements in road connectivity and said surveys would be conducted for alternative bypass roads in border areas to ease daily movement. He reiterated the government's focus on education, entrepreneurship and security, and called for public cooperation to maintain peace in border regions.



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## JOURNALISM STRENGTHENS DEMOCRACY

**R**ahul Gandhi being disallowed by the Hon'ble Speaker to refer to a reputed magazine article – carrying excerpts from a yet-to-be-published book by former Army Chief Manoj Mukund Naravane – should be viewed in a democratic and institutional light, not merely as a matter of parliamentary propriety.

Members of Parliament have the right to speak freely inside the House. This protection, known as parliamentary privilege, exists so that matters of public concern can be raised without fear of legal consequences.

It is worth noting that the material Rahul Gandhi was trying to cite was neither secret nor leaked intelligence. It had already been published by an established magazine, which means it was part of the public domain. In parliamentary systems, elected representatives are expected to debate issues already being discussed in society. Referring to published material is not unusual; it is part of normal political discourse.

Interestingly, General Naravane has not publicly denied the excerpts attributed to him. Until an author disputes what has been published, those extracts remain part of legitimate public discussion.

It is also worth remembering who the source is. General Naravane served as Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army, a role involving the highest responsibility for national security. An officer who rose through every major rank, including promotions from Major General to Army Chief during the tenure of the current regime, would have been carefully vetted at each stage. His professional views may be debated or disagreed with, but they cannot simply be brushed aside as uninformed, or not in the interest of India's security. To argue that his observations should not even be discussed would indirectly question the system that elevated him to the top – a conclusion few would support.

The broader issue, therefore, is not about Rahul Gandhi's speech but about whether Parliament should remain open to informed discussion, even when it is uncomfortable. Democratic institutions do not become stronger by avoiding debate; they grow stronger when they address difficult issues openly. At the same time, this does not give the Opposition a free hand to disrupt Parliament. Debate must take place within established rules. The responsibility to keep proceedings orderly lies with all parties.

Parliament relies on information circulating in society; it cannot investigate every issue independently. When published journalism is kept out of discussion, the range of debate becomes narrower.

In 2010, Arun Jaitley, while in Opposition, justified parliamentary disruption as a democratic right under certain circumstances. That position may have served the BJP politically when in the opposition, but it has weakened its moral ground when in government. Today, BJP has distanced itself from that ill-advised remark of Arun Jaitley. A tactic defended in opposition became a vulnerability in power.

A similar situation can arise with objections to Rahul Gandhi citing a published article in Parliament. When political roles reverse, the same rule could be used to silence BJP members when sitting in the opposition. Parliamentary norms, once bent for convenience, rarely stay selective – they return as constraints on those who first shaped them.

Indian political history shows that many major national issues first appeared in the press before reaching Parliament. During the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Mundhra financial scandal surfaced after newspapers drew attention to questionable investment decisions involving public money. The issue did not remain confined to editorials. MPs, led by the Congressman and son-in-law of PM Nehru, Feroz Gandhi, raised it in Parliament. Nehru's government faced tough questioning, which eventually led to the resignation of Finance Minister T.T. Krishnamachari and the setting up of a judicial inquiry. It was one of the earliest examples of press reports leading directly to parliamentary accountability.

A similar pattern appeared during the years of Indira Gandhi. Several controversies – ranging from government decisions to concerns about the functioning of institutions – first gained attention through media reporting. Opposition MPs often relied on newspaper investigations and magazine stories, including those relating to Sanjay Gandhi, to question the government inside Parliament. The press brought issues into the open; Parliament became the forum where they were debated.

The trend extended to matters involving leaders' families as well. During the Janata Party period, newspapers carried allegations concerning Morarji Desai's son, Kanti Desai. Some of these claims were sharp and even speculative, but they were taken up in Parliament by political opponents, compelling the leadership to respond. Whether or not such allegations were later proven, the important democratic point was that media reports led to parliamentary questioning.

Parliament is not a court deciding guilt or innocence. It is a forum of political accountability. Issues raised by journalists – confirmed, disputed, or unclear – can still be debated because they involve public trust and governance.

This tradition continued in later decades. Investigative reporting by Arun Shourie exposed misuse of authority in the Antulay episode. The issue became nationally significant when it reached Parliament, eventually leading to the resignation of Chief Minister A.R. Antulay.

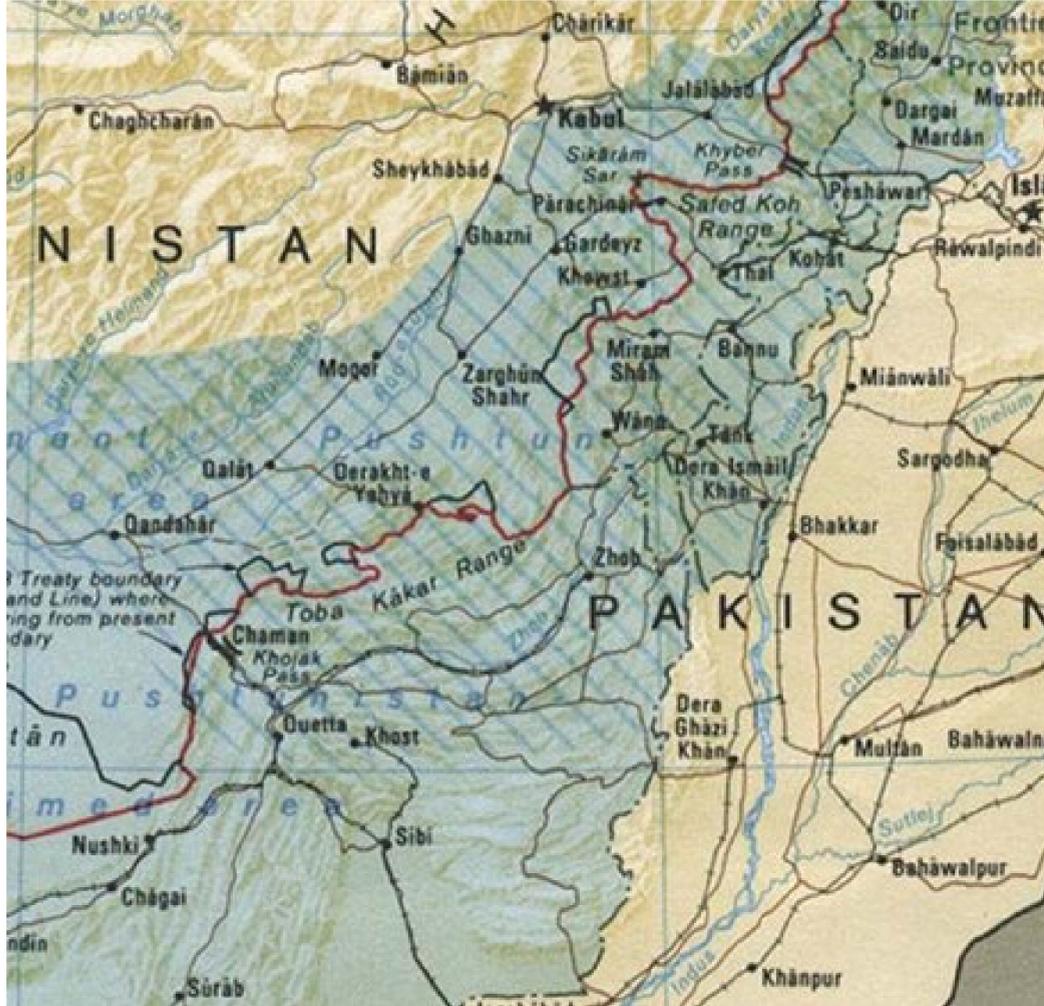
The Bofors controversy followed the same pattern. Noted journalist Chitra Subramaniam tracked alleged kickbacks in a defence deal. Her investigative reporting in a national daily brought the matter into public view, but it was parliamentary debate that turned it into a political storm. Later, the telecom spectrum case and the coal block allocation issue during Manmohan Singh's tenure were also first widely reported in the media before dominating parliamentary sessions.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

“The best thing you can do is to be exceptionally good at something.”

- Warren Buffett

# THE DURAND LINE AXIS OF SECURITY CRISIS IN S ASIA



PIOTR OPALINSKI

Relations between Pakistan and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan are currently among the most unstable elements of South Asia's security architecture. Increasing border incidents, escalating political tensions, and growing activity of extremist groups indicate that the Islamabad-Kabul conflict has transcended the framework of incidental crises and taken on the character of a chronic regional threat. The beginning of 2026 confirmed this trend, bringing further militarization of the border, continued trade blockades, and a deepening diplomatic impasse.

The consequences of the crisis extend beyond bilateral relations, affecting the interests of China, Iran, Russia, India, and Central Asian states, as well as the security of regional trade routes. Its axis is defined by the Durand Line – the border drawn in the 19th century between Afghanistan and British India, and since 1947, Pakistan. It divides ethnically Pashtun lands and has never been formally recognised by Afghan governments, thus failing to serve a stabilising function. It has become a permanent arena of political, military, and narrative rivalry, where state, tribal, and ideological interests intersect, as well as Islamabad's strategic aspirations and the Taliban's need to consolidate power. Islamabad treats securing the border not only as an element of protecting internal security but also as an instrument for managing escalation with Kabul, particularly in the context of the growing activity of the Pakistani Taliban movement (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan – TTP). In turn, the Afghan Taliban are using the dispute with Pakistan to strengthen their internal legitimacy and social mobilisation, although their ability to effectively control the border remains limited by the fragmentation of the power apparatus and the autonomy of local tribal structures.

Military escalation and narrative rivalry  
Armed clashes regularly occur along the border, particularly in Chaman, Spin Boldak, Kurram, and Angoor Adda regions. Tensions stem from three overlapping factors: Kabul's questioning of the border's legitimacy, tightening of Pakistani control, and use of these areas by the TTP as an operational base.

The border has also become an arena for narrative rivalry. Kabul portrays Pakistan's actions as an attempt to impose a colonial

order, while Islamabad interprets the Taliban's stance as indirectly tolerating terrorist threats. The escalation was deepened by Pakistani airstrikes in Paktika and Khost provinces after the Peshawar attack in November 2025, as well as subsequent ground and air operations in Afghanistan, resulting in losses among TTP fighters, civilian casualties, and the temporary closure of border crossings.

Economic Pressure, Deportations, Demographic Dimension

In 2024–2025, the crisis also encompassed economic and demographic dimensions. Pakistan introduced restrictive visa regulations, transit restrictions, and mass deportations of Afghans without valid identity documents – over 1.5 million people. For Islamabad, this was part of a strategy of conditionality and deterrence, justified by security concerns and the activities of the TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan). Beginning 2026, the pressure continued, and the prolonged closure of the main border crossings – Torkham and Spin Boldak – paralyzed legal trade. Afghanistan's losses reached hundreds of millions of dollars, and rising food and fuel prices deepened the humanitarian crisis. Pakistan experienced a decline in transit revenues and increasing social tensions in the border provinces.

Internal Conditions in Pakistan & Afghanistan

Islamabad's pressure on Kabul is not solely a reaction to external threats. It's also part of a broader strategy of internal stabilisation, often implemented at the expense of regional relations. Pakistan's policy is conditioned by the economic crisis, civil-military tensions, and the dominant role of the army in defining security priorities. The escalation of actions at the border and the tough policy towards migrants serve to consolidate power in the centre and create political justification for extraordinary security measures. These actions are also used in internal disputes with the opposition (Imran Khan's PTI) and the authorities of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Erosion of Communication Channels & Activation of TTP

The most persistent source of the crisis remains the activity of the TTP and Kabul's limited ability to neutralize it. The TTP operates in a decentralized, tribal environment, often beyond the real reach of the state apparatus. Between 2023 and 2025, the group evolved from a loose coalition into a more coordinated cross-border

network, focusing on military targets and testing Pakistan's deterrence capabilities.

In December 2025, TTP leadership council, the Rahbari Shura, approved a new administrative and operational structure for 2026. This includes, among other things: establishment of two new management zones, so-called shadow provinces – the Western Zone (Balochistan) and the Central Zone, each with its own military commander-in-chief. New units were also brought under TTP control, including the Kashmir province, and Gilgit was divided.

ISKP Factor in Regional Instability

Parallel to the threats generated by TTP, the regional landscape of instability is complicated by the presence of an actor with ambitions extending beyond the Pakistani-Afghan dimension – the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). Although its operational capabilities are limited, the group maintains a flexible, cellular mode of operation, enabling it to adapt to military pressure and exploit gaps in border control.

The rivalry between ISKP and the Afghan Taliban is both ideological and operational. ISKP challenges the religious legitimacy of the Islamic Emirate, accusing the Taliban of nationalism, political pragmatism, and deviation from the doctrine of global jihad, which facilitates the recruitment of radicalized fighters.

Regional Dimension & Adjustment of External Actors' Approaches

The protracted Pakistani-Afghan crisis is prompting regional and global actors to revise their previous assumptions regarding Afghanistan. China is making infrastructure investments contingent on the actual level of security, treating stability as a condition for the successful implementation of projects; Iran is developing alternative logistical routes, reducing Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan; India maintains working contacts with the Taliban and supports humanitarian and infrastructure projects as an instrument to limit the influence of Pakistan and China. Its involvement in the Chabahar port is formally strategic but limited by US pressure. India is suspending full-scale investments, making them dependent on the predictability of the Taliban's policies and Washington's stance. Russia is offering mediation, framing the crisis in terms of Central Asian security.

These actions indicate a fragmentation of external approaches

and a shift from declarative stabilization to conditional, selective pragmatism towards Kabul. The effectiveness of mediation remains low due to the asymmetry of expectations of the parties and the limited influence of the mediators. From the perspective of the EU and Poland, maintaining dialogue channels provides important signals for planning humanitarian activities, monitoring migration pressure, and analyzing cross-border risks.

Development of the Situation  
Four scenarios are possible in the next two years. One, contin-

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**In Kupwara, Kashmiri youth rode with the Tiranga to counter Pakistan's so-called “Kashmir Solidarity Day” – rejecting propaganda and affirming their belief in India's unity. This is the transformation of Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370. Under the Modi government, Kashmir is breaking free from decades of fear and manipulation. Where separatism once thrived, nationalism now rises. Where stone-pelting was glorified, patriotism leads the way. Where unrest was engineered, peace is being reclaimed.**



uation of controlled escalation – maintaining pressure at the border; deportations, limited goods and passenger transit; Two, Multilateral mediation – temporary freezing of escalation with the support of Qatar, Turkey, China, Russia, and selective involvement of the US; implementation of monitoring and crisis communication mechanisms; Three, Technical de-escalation – limiting TTP activity through operational and intelligence actions, without full normalization of bilateral relations and four, regionalization of the crisis – involvement of external actors, further fragmentation of trade routes, and deepening of cross-border instability.

Indeed, the Pakistani-Afghan confrontation is structural and long-term. The lack of credible dialogue formats and effective escalation control mechanisms means that the Pakistani-Afghan border remains one of the most unstable areas in South and Central Asia. Any international mediation will be hampered by asymmetrical expectations and limited capacity to enforce agreements. The risks are systemic and extend beyond the regional dimension, indirectly affecting the security of the wider Eurasian region.

# Over 2,000 families face eviction as Assam launches major forest land clearance drive in Patharkandi

SILCHAR

In one of the largest anti-encroachment operations undertaken in Assam in recent times, the administration on Sunday launched a massive eviction drive across reserved forest areas in the Patharkandi constituency of Sribhumli district, with more than 2,000 families facing displacement.

The operation is aimed at reclaiming nearly 12,000 hectares of encroached forest land and is currently underway in the Sribhumli Reserved Forest. Eviction notices had earlier been issued to families occupying the protected areas, following which district and forest authorities moved in to clear illegal settlements. Senior district officials and



forest department personnel are supervising the exercise on the ground, with a substantial deployment of police and paramilitary forces to maintain law and order during the drive.

Officials said a large number of residents had already dismantled their homes and relocated after receiving eviction notices. However, the administration has intensified the operation to remove remaining structures and clear encroachments from the forest land. Houses, temporary establishments and vegetation within the reserved areas are being dismantled as part of the reclamation process.

More than 50 heavy machines, including JCBs and excavators, have been pressed into service to expedite the clearance. Ele-

phants are also being used by forest officials to navigate and operate in difficult terrain. Police and forest personnel have been mobilised from different parts of the state to ensure the operation proceeds without disruption.

The eviction drive is being carried out across multiple forest blocks in the Patharkandi region, including Madhurban, Narayanpur, Chagalmoza, Madhabpur, Badshahi and Dohalia reserved forest areas.

Authorities said the exercise is part of a broader effort to restore protected forest land, curb illegal occupation and prevent further encroachment, reiterating the government's commitment to forest conservation and the enforcement of environmental laws.

## Medical officers' regularisation: NSF pauses protests, seeks dialogue with high-powered panel

KOHIMA

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Saturday decided to temporarily put on hold its proposed mass democratic action over the regularisation of 97 Medical Officers under the Health and Family Welfare Department, opting instead to pursue dialogue with the High-Powered Committee (HPC) constituted by the state government.

The decision was taken at the second Emergency Presidential Council Meeting of the NSF (2025-2027), held at NSF Oking on February 7, to review the government's response after the expiry of the federation's ultimatum issued on December 20, 2025.

While the ultimatum has formally lapsed, the federation said all democratic measures have been kept in abeyance for the time being in the interest of constructive engagement. At the same time, it cautioned that future steps could be taken if discussions fail to deliver a fair and just resolution.

During the meeting, the council placed on record its appreciation for the services of health workers, particularly acknowledging their frontline role during the COVID-19 pandemic and their continued contribution to public health across the state.

The council also took note of the state Cabinet's decision on February 3, 2026, to keep the regularisation orders in abeyance and to constitute an HPC to re-examine the matter. In response, the house authorised and endorsed the NSF Executive Council to engage with the committee to seek an amicable solution.

Reiterating its stand, the NSF urged all its units to remain vigilant and prepared for any course of action should the dialogue fail to yield satisfactory outcomes. The federation also reaffirmed its commitment to transparency, meritocracy and constitutional procedures, while safeguarding the interests of the student community and the public.

## Meghalaya cracks down on illegal coal mining in Thangsko; East Jaintia Hills orders seizures, detentions

SHILLONG

The East Jaintia Hills district administration has imposed a complete ban on illegal coal mining in the Thangsko area, stepping up enforcement with orders to seize vehicles, machinery and other assets linked to unauthorised extraction.

The crackdown, announced on February 7, follows explicit directions from the Meghalaya High Court, which has called for immediate and stringent action against those involved in unlawful coal mining. District Magistrate Manish Kumar said the administration would take all necessary legal measures to halt illegal operations and dismantle the networks sustaining them.

In compliance with the court's directive, magistrates, supported by local police, have been tasked with identifying and detaining mine owners, operators, financiers and others connected to illegal coal extraction in the area. Authorities have also been instructed to secure and seize all equipment, vehicles and materials

used in or facilitating such activities.

The administration has introduced enhanced enforcement protocols, directing designated magistrates to maintain strict vigilance and conduct regular inspections across Thangsko. Those found violating the ban will face prosecution under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act and other applicable laws.

Officials clarified that enforcement would extend beyond direct participants in illegal mining. Any vehicle, machinery or material aiding illicit extraction will be liable for immediate seizure, underscoring what the administration described as a zero-tolerance approach.

Highlighting the need for tougher action, the District Magistrate noted that despite earlier interventions, the administration had received credible complaints from residents and reports on social media suggesting that illegal mining and unlawful extraction of minor minerals were continuing in the area.

## Missing Tripura youth found dead near Dzukou Valley; Kohima Police say no foul play suspected

KOHIMA

Kohima Police have confirmed the recovery of the body of Pranab Das, a 22-year-old youth from West Tripura, near the Dzukou Valley, bringing a crucial development in a missing person case that had triggered extensive search operations over the past month.

Das, a resident of Malaynagar under Srinagar police station in West Tripura district, was reported missing earlier this year. The recovery is linked to South Police Station case No. 0005/26 registered under Section 140(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

According to police, the complaint regarding Das's disappearance was lodged by his family at South Police Station, Kohima, on January 6, 2026. He had arrived in Kohima on January 2 and was stay-

ing at a home stay in Lerie Colony. Investigations revealed that he was last seen leaving the accommodation early on January 4.

Police records further showed that Das had booked an entry ticket to Dzukou Valley from the Viswema entry point on the same day. As part of the investigation, statements were recorded from the home stay caretaker, a taxi driver, family members and other relevant witnesses. Authorities also carried out technical analysis of call detail records, bank transactions and CCTV footage from nearby areas.

Kohima Police coordinated multiple search and rescue operations in collaboration with the Southern Angami Youth Organization (SAYO), the district administration and the Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA). Drone-assisted searches were con-

## Assam CM orders police case against Bhupen Borah over alleged obscene gesture at public event

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday directed the Director General of Police (DGP) to register a case against former Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Bhupen Borah over alleged indecent behaviour and "obscene gestures" at a public place, triggering a fresh political flashpoint in the state.

According to the Chief Minister, the directive followed reports and visuals of an incident in which Borah allegedly displayed inappropriate conduct during a public interaction. Sarma said the alleged episode took place in the presence of Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia and Congress leader Mira Borthakur.

Taking a firm stand, Sarma described the alleged behaviour of the senior Congress leader as "indecent and uncontrolled," asserting that such conduct was unacceptable in public life. He said he had instructed the police

to register cases not only against Bhupen Borah but also against Mira Borthakur and Debabrata Saikia in connection with the incident, citing the seriousness of the allegations.

"The incident has deeply hurt the sentiments of Assamese women and girls," the Chief Minister said while speaking to reporters. He added that he was raising the matter "with a sad note," stating that the alleged gestures were beyond imagination and unbecoming of leaders entrusted with public responsibility. Sarma said further details would be shared after a Cabinet briefing.

Referring to the sequence of events, Sarma alleged that Borah had begun his speech by quoting cultural icon Sudhakantha Bhupen Hazarika in the presence of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, but claimed that the address soon degenerated into the use of obscene language and inappropriate gestures, leaving many in the audience disappointed.

The Chief Minister also claimed that visuals of the incident had reached him from Delhi, where people reportedly questioned whether such conduct had become normal in Assam. Describing the footage as "shocking," Sarma said it raised serious concerns about the mindset of the Congress leadership.

Providing additional context, Sarma suggested that the alleged gestures may have been a reaction to slogans raised from the roadside, possibly by women expressing reluctance to vote for the Congress. However, he emphasised that no form of provocation could justify such behaviour, particularly from senior political leaders.

Questioning the limited media coverage of the incident, Sarma expressed surprise that the visuals had not been widely aired on television or digital platforms. He said it was difficult to comprehend how a Leader of the Opposition, a former APCC pres-

ident and a woman Congress leader could all be associated with such conduct.

"Congress has reached its lowest level," Sarma remarked, adding that he bore no personal animosity but felt compelled to question the mentality behind the alleged actions.

In a sharp political swipe, he said leaders accused of such behaviour still aspired to head ministries related to women and social welfare, or even to become Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister further announced that he had formally requested the video clip of the incident to be forwarded to the Assam State Women's Commission, urging the body to take cognisance of the matter. He said the issue concerned the dignity and respect of women and must be examined seriously by the appropriate authority.

The Congress party has not issued an official response so far to the allegations or to the Chief Minister's directive to the police.

## CBI registers case against three Mizoram Customs officials over Rs.35 lakh bribery allegations

AIZAWL

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered a First Information Report (FIR) against three Customs officials who were previously posted in Mizoram for allegedly accepting bribes exceeding ₹35 lakh to facilitate the release of smuggled goods, the agency said on Friday.

The accused include a retired Superintendent and two Inspectors, who were serving with the Customs Preventive Force (CPF) in Champhai town of east Mizoram, a key transit point along the India-Myanmar border, during 2022-23.

According to the CBI, the case was registered on February 3 following a complaint lodged by the Additional Commissioner of Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST), Guwahati. The officials are accused of abusing their official positions to illegally release consignments of smuggled areca nuts (betel nuts) and foreign cigarettes.

Investigators alleged that the officials intercepted multiple consignments but failed to initiate legal proceedings or maintain proper documentation. Instead, they allegedly demanded and accepted bribes in several instalments, amounting to more than ₹35 lakh, in exchange for releasing the seized goods.

The probe also uncovered

discrepancies in official storage records. A subsequent inspection of godowns revealed that seized goods worth over ₹1.42 crore, confiscated between December 2022 and April 2023, were missing from the available stock.

As part of the investigation, the CBI conducted simultaneous searches at multiple locations across five states, including Guwahati in Assam, Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikar in Rajasthan, Patna in Bihar and Churachandpur in Manipur. The searches were aimed at tracing the alleged bribe money and recovering incriminating documents and material evidence.

A CBI official said the investigation is ongoing and that the involvement of additional officials or private intermediaries cannot be ruled out as the probe progresses.

The action comes against the backdrop of an intensified crackdown on the smuggling of drugs and Burmese areca nuts in Mizoram, led by the state government and supported by civil society organisations.

In late 2024, the Gauhati High Court had ordered a CBI inquiry into large-scale smuggling of dried areca nuts along the India-Myanmar border, following concerns raised by local farmers that the influx of duty-free, low-quality imports had severely impacted the indigenous economy.

## GNRC-led North East Quality Conclave 2026 puts spotlight on patient safety, healthcare innovation

GUWAHATI

GNRC Hospitals, in collaboration with the Consortium of Accredited Healthcare Organizations (CAHO) and the Association of Healthcare Providers-India (AHP) NE-1, on Friday hosted the inaugural North East Quality Conclave 2026 at the NEDFI Convention Centre in Guwahati, bringing together healthcare leaders from across the region to deliberate on patient safety and quality improvement.

The first-of-its-kind conclave saw participation from clinicians, hospital administrators, quality professionals, policymakers and solution providers from across Northeast India, reflecting growing regional momentum towards strengthening healthcare standards and governance.

Designed as a collaborative platform, the conclave featured four technical sessions, quality improvement project presentations and an interactive quiz competition, all aimed at promoting continuous improvement and shared learning within healthcare institutions.

Setting the tone for the day, Dr Lallu Joseph, Secretary General of CAHO and Quality Manager and Associate General Superintendent at Christian Medical College, Vellore, delivered the keynote address titled "Healthcare Quality 360° - The Future is Now", highlighting emerging trends and the need for integrated approaches to quality and patient safety.

The conclave also recognised contributions

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to healthcare in the region, honouring Dr Narendra Nath Dutta, Dr Harsha Bhattacharjee, Dr Kh Palin and Prof Dr Subhash Khanna for their services.

Senior government and institutional leaders in attendance included Dr Lakshmanan S., IAS, Mission Director, National Health Mission (NHM), Assam; Prof Dr Ashok Kumar Puranik, Executive Director, AIIMS Guwahati; Dr A C Baishya, Principal-cum-Chief Superintendent, Gauhati Medical College and Hospital; Dr Ramen Talukdar, Principal-cum-Chief Superintendent, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Medical College and Hospital, Barpeta; and Dr Umesh Phangcho, Director of Health Services, Assam. Speakers underlined the importance of collaboration between public and private stakeholders to deliver high-quality, patient-centred care.

Addressing the gathering, Priyanka Borah, Deputy Managing Director, GNRC Group of Hospitals, said the conclave marked an important step towards building a unified quality movement in the Northeast. She noted that the platform would help accelerate the adoption of global best practices and strengthen collaboration across institutions to improve patient outcomes.

The four thematic sessions focused on contemporary challenges and opportunities in healthcare. Discussions covered digital transformation and its impact on quality, balancing cost and care standards, incorporating patient voices into outcome measurement, and the debate around accreditation as a continuous process rather than a one-time audit exercise.

A key highlight was the presentation of Quality Improvement Projects by participating institutions, showcasing innovative initiatives to enhance patient care and operational

efficiency. Three shortlisted projects were presented before a panel chaired by Prof Dr Arati Deka, Academic Head, Rainbow Pratiksha Hospital.

Summing up the event, Sanjeeb Kakati, Advisor, Quality Initiatives, GNRC Hospitals, said the strong engagement reflected a shared commitment across the Northeast to quality improvement. He added that the conclave had laid the foundation for sustained dialogue and collaboration, and is expected to evolve into an annual platform for advancing healthcare quality in the region.

Assam CM disburses ₹56 crore under CMAAA 2.0 to over 5,500 young entrepreneurs Guwahati, Feb 7: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday disbursed more than ₹56 crore as the first instalment of financial assistance under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Assam Abhiyan (CMAAA) 2.0, benefiting 5,572 young entrepreneurs from Kamrup and Kamrup (Metro) districts.

The ceremonial distribution was held at the Jyoti-Bishnu International Auditorium in Guwahati, marking a major push by the state government to promote entrepreneurship as a key tool to address unemployment and stimulate economic growth.

CMAAA 2.0, an extension of the flagship Atmanirbhar Assam initiative, is designed to encourage youth-led enterprises and help young people transition from job seekers to job creators. Addressing the beneficiaries, Sarma said the scheme aims to empower up to 10 lakh youths in the coming years, underlining the scale of the government's ambition.

According to officials, the state has already extended financial support to around one lakh youths to help them enter entrepreneurship,

as part of a broader strategy to diversify employment opportunities beyond conventional sectors.

The government described the rollout of CMAAA 2.0 as a significant milestone in its commitment to create one lakh new entrepreneurs alongside the provision of one lakh government jobs. Authorities said this dual approach forms the backbone of Assam's employment and economic development strategy.

State officials also highlighted that the scale of direct financial assistance under CMAAA is unprecedented.

They noted that no other state has undertaken such large-scale direct investment in youth entrepreneurs, with the objective of building a robust and enabling ecosystem for enterprise development.

Stakeholders believe the targeted investment will not only strengthen Assam's entrepreneurial landscape but also contribute to long-term economic resilience and self-reliance. The initiative is expected to foster innovation, generate employment and encourage a sustained entrepreneurial mindset among the youth.

Further instalments under CMAAA 2.0 are planned in the coming years. The government has reiterated its commitment to complement financial assistance with mentorship, institutional support and market linkages to ensure the sustainability of youth-led businesses.

Officials said the programme will continue to be closely monitored to assess its impact on employment generation and economic transformation, as Assam positions entrepreneurship at the centre of its development agenda.

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## Centre to implement comprehensive usage protocol of authorised digital devices for forces



NEW DELHI

The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) with active support from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), is in the advanced stages of developing a new software-based firewall and a comprehensive usage protocol aimed at countering online espionage.

The initiative is designed to strengthen cyber defence across security forces and other strategic agencies by preventing hostile exploitation of digital devices and safeguarding sensitive operational data.

According to sources familiar with the development, the proposed framework is expected to be formalised soon and this will introduce uniform standards for the use of authorised digital

devices within intelligence, police and paramilitary establishments.

It will also restrict the use of personal gadgets in sensitive operational zones and mandate advanced monitoring, auditing and logging of digital communications. The move comes amid growing concerns that compromised devices are increasingly being used as entry points for espionage, posing serious risks to national security.

The sources said the framework will clearly spell out policy objectives along with strict operational guidelines, addressing the rising threat of "digital espionage" linked to device vulnerabilities.

A source noted that there is mounting evidence of foreign-backed espionage networks actively targeting

Indian personnel involved in strategic affairs and border security. "The objective is to prevent hostile exploitation of devices and protect hyper-sensitive operational data," he said.

As part of the plan, a centralised hardware procurement mechanism will be established to ensure that all devices are sourced through vetted and trusted supply chains. Software installations, data storage practices and external connectivity will be governed by stringent norms to reduce exposure to malware, spyware and unauthorised data access. These measures, the sources said, are intended to enforce disciplined digital hygiene. Another source highlighted that the evolving espionage landscape has forced authorities to reassess internal vulnerabilities.

## Indus water flowing to Pakistan to be stopped, used in India's interest: Union Minister Patil

JAIPUR

Union Water Resources Minister C.R. Patil said the Indus River water currently flowing towards Pakistan will be stopped and used in India's interest.

Patil made the remark while speaking to the media at the BJP headquarters in Jaipur on Saturday, claiming that "the diverted water would benefit several states, including Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and Rajasthan".

"The central government is preparing an action plan in this regard. A Detailed Project Report (DPR) has already been prepared to divert the water flowing to Pakistan," he said.

However, the Union Minister did not comment on the amount of water that may still be released due to technical or unavoidable reasons.

The Indus Waters Treaty, a water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan, was signed on September 19, 1960, in Karachi. Under the treaty, control over the Indus River and its western tributaries—Jhelum and Chenab—was largely granted to Pakistan.

India was allowed limited use of these rivers for purposes such as hydropower generation, irrigation, and drinking water, but was prohibited from stopping or diverting their flow. India was also permitted to construct run-of-the-river hydropower projects on these rivers.

In contrast, India has full control and unrestricted usage rights over the eastern rivers—Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej. Following the Pahalgam terror attack, on April 22, 2025, in which 26 people were killed and 17 were injured, India announced the temporary suspension of the costs of not addressing the deteriorating relations," he said.

According to reports, nearly



80 per cent of Pakistan's agricultural land—around 16 million hectares—depends on the Indus River system. The river network supports approximately 25 per cent of Pakistan's GDP and the livelihoods of nearly 70 per cent of its rural population. Any significant disruption in water flow could adversely impact crop production, food security, and economic stability. Major cities such as Karachi, Lahore, and Multan also rely heavily on the Indus system for urban water supply.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has filed

a complaint against India's hydropower projects in the Court of Arbitration at The Hague, objecting to projects in Jammu and Kashmir, including Baglihar and Kishanganga. Hearings in the matter were scheduled for February 2-3, during which the court sought operational data from India.

India has categorically refused to comply, stating that it does not recognise the court's jurisdiction. The government has termed the court's directions illegal and void, reiterating that it has never accepted the authority of the Court of

Arbitration in this matter.

Separately, Patil also said in Jaipur that work on the Yamuna water project would be expedited to ensure better water management and utilisation for beneficiary states. He stated that Rajasthan has a rightful claim over the Yamuna water, but alleged that previous governments failed to take concrete steps in this direction.

He added that an agreement has now been reached between the Haryana and Rajasthan governments to prepare a DPR, and work on the project will begin soon.

## INTERNATIONAL

### 'Really pivoting...': Bangladesh elections test ties with India as China deepens outreach

DHAKA/NEW DELHI

Bangladesh's elections next week could reshape South Asia's balance of power, as Beijing seeks to consolidate influence and ties with India falter, analysts say.

The February 12 poll will be the nation's first since a student-led uprising toppled the regime of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

India's sheltering of Hasina—despite extradition requests—has angered Dhaka's interim government headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, which has deepened engagement with China and Pakistan.

The Muslim-majority nation of 170 million people maintained strong trade and defence ties with China under Hasina, but New Delhi was Dhaka's pre-eminent partner, an arrangement that analysts say is shifting.

"The interim government in Bangladesh, and a future government, is really pivoting to China," said Joshua Kurlantzick, a senior fellow at the US-based Council on Foreign Relations.

"Bangladesh now has become central to China's strategic thinking regarding the Bay of Bengal, and China is increasingly confident that Bangladesh will play a pro-China role in this strategy."

Yunus' first state visit was to China, signalling a strategic shift.

The two countries in January inked a key new defence agreement for a drone plant at a proposed northern airbase near India.

"Whatever the outcomes of the elections, there is an irreversible possibility of further deepening Bangladesh-China relations," Delwar Hussain of the University of Dhaka said.

Bangladeshis hold a protest



against the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) during the ongoing World T20 cricket tournament and against India's alleged interference in Bangladesh's upcoming National Parliamentary Election, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026.

'Censored, vilified, judged': Pushed to margins, women vanish from Bangladesh's political arena

Conversely, New Delhi and Dhaka have regularly sparred since Hasina's ouster. India's foreign ministry in December condemned what it called "unremitting hostility against minorities", pointing to the violence against Hindus in Bangladesh.

Police say around 70 members of Bangladesh's minority communities were killed in sectarian violence in 2025.

Dhaka has accused India of exaggerating the scale of the violence. But

there have also been sporadic efforts at reconciliation.

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in January visited Dhaka for the funeral of former leader Khaleda Zia, whose Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is widely seen as a frontrunner in the election.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also sent a condolence message to her son Tarique Rahman, 60, who is seen as a potential prime minister if the BNP wins.

But things unravelled when a Bangladeshi cricketer was removed from the Indian Premier League after Hindu right-wing protests, leading Bangladesh to withdraw from the T20 World Cup in India.

Bangladeshis hold a protest against the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) during the ongoing World T20 cricket tournament

and against India's alleged interference in Bangladesh's upcoming National Parliamentary Election, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026.

Praveen Donthi of the International Crisis Group said both sides are likely to be pragmatic. "Both New Delhi and Dhaka are fully aware of the costs of not addressing the deteriorating relations," he said.

Dhaka has also deepened engagement with Pakistan—India's arch-enemy—resuming direct flights in January after more than a decade.

Experts say a new government will likely continue to normalise ties with Islamabad without undermining relations with New Delhi. "The new dispensation will likely prioritise stability over disruption," Donthi said.

Retired diplomat Hyumayun Kabir predicted ties could stabilise under an elected government, especially if the BNP wins.

But even Jamaat-e-Islami, the Islamist party once sharply at odds with India, has projected "a kind of pragmatic realism" in its campaign, he said.

Despite heated rhetoric, the material core of the India-Bangladesh relationship remains. Trade has stayed stable, and only one Hasina-era bilateral deal—for Indian tugboats—has been scrapped.

"China delivers infrastructure in a way India cannot," said former Indian diplomat Dilip Sinha, who has served as New Delhi's deputy high commissioner in Bangladesh.

"But India provides things Bangladesh critically needs—power and yarn for the garment industry."

Analysts suggested that inevitably stronger ties with China also need not mean hostilities with India. "It is not an either-or situation," Kabir said. "Both relationships can thrive at the same time."

## Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi hopes for big win as polls open in national elections

TOKYO

Polls opened Sunday in parliamentary elections that Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi hopes will give her struggling party a big enough win to push through an ambitious conservative political agenda.

Takaichi is hugely popular, but the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which has governed Japan for most of the last seven decades, has struggled from funding and religious scandals. She called Sunday's snap elections hoping to turn that around.

She wants to make progress on a right-wing agenda that aims to boost Japan's economy and military capabilities as tensions grow with China. She also wants to nurture ties with her crucial US ally, and a sometimes unpredictable President Donald Trump.

The ultraconservative Takaichi, who took office as Japan's first female leader in October, pledged to "work, work, work," and her style, which is seen as both playful and tough, has resonated with younger fans.

The latest surveys indicated a landslide win in the lower house for the LDP. The opposition, despite the formation of a new centrist alliance and a rising far-right, is seen as too splintered to be a real challenger.

Takaichi is betting that her LDP party, together with its new partner, the Japan Innovation Party, will secure a majority in the 465-seat lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament.

Recent surveys by major Japanese newspapers show a possibility that Takaichi's party could win a simple majority on its own while her coalition could win as many as 300 seats—a big jump from a thin majority it held since a 2024 election loss.



If the LDP fails to win a majority, "I will step down," she said.

A big win by Takaichi's coalition could mean a significant shift to the right in Japan's security, immigration and other policies, with its right-wing partner JIP's leader Hirofumi Yoshimura saying his party will serve as an "accelerator." Japan has recently seen far-right populists gain ground, such as the anti-globalist and surging nationalist party Sanseito.

A voter fills in a ballot in the lower house election at a polling station Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026, in Tokyo.

Sanae Takaichi breaks barriers as Japan's first female ruling party leader—a conservative star in a male-dominated group. Takaichi has pledged to revise security and defense policies by December to bolster Japan's offensive military capabilities, lifting a ban on weapons exports and moving further away from the country's post-war pacifist principles.

She has been pushing for tougher policies on foreigners, anti-espionage and other measures that resonate with a far-right audience but ones that experts say could undermine civil rights.

Takaichi also wants to increase defense spending in response to Trump's pressure on Japan to loosen its purse strings.

Though Takaichi said she

is seeking the public's mandate for her "nation splitting policies," she avoided contentious issues such as ways to fund soaring military spending, how to fix diplomatic tension with China and other controversial issues.

In her campaign speeches, Takaichi enthusiastically talked about the need for "proactive" government spending to fund "crisis management investment and growth," such as measures to strengthen economic security, technology and other industries. Takaichi also seeks to push tougher measures on immigration and foreigners, including stricter requirements for foreign property owners and a cap on foreign residents.

Still, Kazuki Ishihara, 54, said she voted for the LDP for stability and in hopes for something new under Takaichi. "I have some hope that she could do something" her predecessors could not.

A 50-year-old office worker Yoshinori Tamada said his interest is wages. "I think a lot when I look at my pay slip, and I cast my vote for a party that I believe I can trust in that regard."

Sunday's vote started under fresh snowfall across the country, including in Tokyo. Record snowfall in northern Japan over the last few weeks, which blocked roads and was blamed for dozens of deaths nationwide, could hinder voting or delay vote counting in hard-hit areas.

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trained well in science and policy are needed. The college believes its graduates are ready for that role.

Many of the selected candidates come from modest backgrounds. For them, the job means stability and dignity. It also means a chance to serve their own region. Tripura, like much of the Northeast, is pushing for self-reliance in fish production. Skilled officers will be key to that goal.

The college has also acknowledged

the role of its staff and support teams. From laboratories to libraries, from hostels to classrooms, an enabling academic space made the difference.

As celebrations settle, the mood on campus is calm but confident. Juniors are watching closely. Aspirations feel closer now.

For CAU's College of Fisheries, the message is clear. With the right guidance and effort, even tough public exams can be cracked. And sometimes, many at once.

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Something rare has happened at the College of Fisheries, Central Agricultural University, Imphal. In the final results declared by the Tripura Public Service Commission, as many as 41 graduates from the college have been selected as Fisheries Officers under the Tripura government. For one institution, and one discipline, the number is striking.

For students and teachers at the College of Fisheries, the news spread fast. Phone calls. Messages. Quiet smiles in corridors. Years of study had turned into secure public service roles. It was not just success. It was history.

The achievement has brought pride to the entire CAU system. It has also sent a strong signal across the Northeast that focused teaching and steady guidance still matter

in competitive exams.

Vice-Chancellor Dr. Anupam Mishra called the result a moment of joy for the university. He congratulated the selected graduates and praised their discipline and hard work. He also reminded students that public service carries responsibility, not just status.

Dean of the College of Fisheries, Prof. A. B. Patel, said the result did not come overnight. According to him, the college has worked for years to align classroom learning with real-world needs. Regular mentoring, exam-oriented preparation, and close teacher-student interaction have been central to this effort.

Faculty members say fisheries is no longer a narrow field. It touches food security, rural income, nutrition, and climate resilience. Officers



As a man, being disliked by the wrong people is a good sign.

# Fear Before the Ballot: Bangladesh's Minorities and the Price of Political Upheaval



A tree stands on a road divider where the body of 27-year-old Hindu garment worker Dipu Chandra Das was hung and set on fire by a mob on Dec. 18, 2025, in Gazipur near Dhaka, Bangladesh, Jan. 9, 2026. (AP Photo/Mahmud Hossain Opu)

## SANGRAM DATTA:

In the days leading up to Bangladesh's national election scheduled for 12 February 2026, a series of international media reports has drawn renewed global attention to the insecurity faced by the country's religious minorities. On 5 February 2026, the Associated Press published a report titled "Bangladesh's Hindu minority in fear as attacks rise and a national election nears." Similar coverage appeared in The Washington Post on 4 February 2026 under the same headline, and Australia's ABC News echoed the concern in its own reporting that day. Taken together, these accounts do more than document isolated tragedies—they illuminate a recurring pattern of fear, vulnerability, and political uncertainty that has shadowed minority communities across decades of the region's history.

At the center of recent attention lies the killing of Dipu Chandra Das, a 27-year-old garment worker accused of making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad. According to international reporting, the accusation triggered mob violence that ended in his death. Images circulated widely, deepening anxiety among Hindu communities already uneasy amid intensifying political competition. Protests demanding

justice followed, and authorities announced arrests and an investigation. Yet human rights advocates and minority leaders argue that the incident reflects a broader surge in attacks rather than a singular eruption of violence.

Bangladesh's demographic reality underscores the stakes. Hindus constitute roughly 8 percent of a population of about 170 million, while Muslims account for the overwhelming majority. Minority advocacy organizations report thousands of incidents of communal violence since the political upheaval of August 2024 that removed former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from power. Documented cases include killings, assaults on women, and attacks on places of worship.

Government officials dispute claims of systemic failure, insisting that many incidents stem from personal or political disputes rather than religious hostility. This divergence in interpretation between official reassurance and minority fear forms the core tension of the present moment.

History lends weight to that fear. Communal violence in Bengal did not begin in the twenty-first century; it has repeatedly resurfaced during periods of political transition. The Noakhali riots of 1946 left deep scars on collective memory. In

the early years of Pakistan, Law Minister Jogendra Nath Mandal ultimately resigned and left for India following violence against vulnerable communities he felt powerless to protect. The 1971 Liberation War produced one of the largest refugee movements in South Asian history, with millions many from minority backgrounds crossing into India amid widespread devastation. Subsequent decades witnessed recurring outbreaks of communal tension, from idol vandalism in the 1970s to major disturbances in 1989, 1990, 1992, 2001, and the Ramu violence of 2012. Each episode reinforced a perception among minorities that political turbulence often translates into personal insecurity.

Elections, in particular, have long been flashpoints. Minority voters are frequently perceived fairly or not as aligned with specific political camps. Such perceptions can heighten vulnerability in polarized environments, especially when law enforcement responses are viewed as inconsistent. Analysts also highlight land disputes as an underlying driver of violence: displacement during unrest can make property easier to seize, blending communal tension with material incentive. When accountability appears uncertain, fear becomes self-perpetuating.

The present electoral cycle

unfolds amid shifting political alliances and the reemergence of Islamist parties once pushed to the margins. Some parties now emphasize inclusivity and minority outreach, nominating minority candidates and pledging institutional protections. Critics, however, describe these gestures as largely symbolic, arguing that meaningful security depends less on rhetoric than on impartial governance, credible investigations, and consistent prosecution of perpetrators.

Regional geopolitics further complicates the picture. Attacks on minorities in Bangladesh have sparked criticism from India, while Bangladeshi authorities accuse New Delhi of politicizing the issue. Diplomatic friction has spilled into visa policies and even sporting relations, illustrating how communal insecurity within one nation can reverberate across borders. For vulnerable families, however, geopolitical debate offers little immediate comfort; their concerns remain grounded in safety, justice, and survival.

What emerges from the convergence of historical memory, contemporary violence, and electoral uncertainty is not simply a minority issue but a democratic test. The protection of vulnerable citizens is among the clearest measures of institutional strength. Where minorities feel secure, rule of law is credible; where they live in fear, governance itself is questioned.

Bangladesh stands at a consequential juncture.

The approaching election will determine political leadership, but it will also signal whether the nation can break from cycles that have repeatedly endangered its most vulnerable communities. Ensuring accountability for violence, safeguarding places of worship, protecting property rights, and affirming equal citizenship are not concessions to minorities they are prerequisites for democratic stability.

International attention, as reflected in the February 2026 reporting by the Associated Press, The Washington Post, and ABC News, should not be viewed merely as external scrutiny. It is also an opportunity: a reminder that the world is watching, and that the credibility of democratic institutions depends on their ability to protect every citizen, regardless of faith.

For Bangladesh's minorities, the hope is simple yet profound that fear will no longer precede the ballot, and that citizenship will carry equal meaning in moments of calm and crisis alike.



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