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PERSPECTIVE

Smoking a cigarette causes damage in minutes - not years.

Guwahati Court Bars Congress Leaders from Making Fresh Remarks Against Assam CM

GUWAHATI

A civil court in Guwahati has issued an ad-interim injunction restraining senior Congress leaders Gaurav Gogoi, Bhupesh Baghel and Jitendra Singh from making any further "defamatory statements" against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in connection with a ₹500 crore defamation suit filed by him.

The order was passed by Civil Judge (Senior Division) No. 1, Nayanjyoti Sarma, after hearing arguments from the petitioner's counsel. The court directed the three Congress leaders, along with certain prominent Assamese individuals named in the plea, to refrain from making, publishing, circulating or disseminating any statements or materials deemed defamatory against the Chief Minister until they appear before the court.

The defamation suit was filed by Sarma following allegations that he had illegally acquired or owned 12,000 bighas of land. The Chief Minister has strongly denied the charges, describing them as baseless and malicious. He has publicly challenged the Congress leaders to substantiate their claims and has sought ₹500 crore in damages if they fail to produce evidence in support of their allegations.

In his order granting interim relief, Judge Sarma observed that failure to issue an ad-interim injunction at this stage could "defeat the justice" and result in a multiplicity of proceedings. The observation indicates the court's prima facie view that temporary protection was necessary pending further hearing.

WHO SAID WHAT



The National Data Centre, Guwahati will be North East's ICT backbone. Adopting a cloud first approach, the centre will ensure scalability of e-governance initiatives and provide secure facilities. Adaniya Narendra Modi ji will dedicate this centre on 14th February. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

GUWAHATI

The nationwide strike called by a joint platform of central trade unions on Thursday made its impact felt across Assam, with oil refineries, public transport services and key commercial areas witnessing significant disruption.

The "Bharat Bandh", backed by 10 central trade unions and supported by several farmer organisations, saw protests erupt from early morning in parts of the State. Organisers claimed that nearly 30 crore workers across the country participated in the strike against the four labour codes enacted by the Centre in 2020.

In Guwahati, the entrance to the Guwahati Refinery at Noonmati turned into a protest venue as members of the United Workmen Union and the Thikadari Shramik Union staged demonstrations demanding the withdrawal of the labour codes. Workers assembled outside the refinery gates, raising slogans and voicing concerns over what they described as threats to job security and labour rights.

"We want the Central government to scrap the labour codes. If these codes



are implemented, workers will lose job security and be deprived of their rights," said Girish Kalita, General Secretary of the United Workmen Union, while addressing the gathering.

The strike had a cascading effect on daily life in the city. Public transport services were severely curtailed, with only a limited number of electric buses operating on select routes. Many commuters were left stranded at bus stops as regular services remained off the roads.

At Mathgharia, residents expressed frustration over the disruption. "We didn't realise the bandh would affect transport services like this. I have to drop my child at school, and now there is no public transport available. The

schools should have remained closed today," said a mother waiting for a bus.

Commercial activity in several parts of the city was subdued, with fewer vehicles plying and some establishments keeping shutters down as a precautionary measure.

In Upper Assam, a similar scene unfolded in Digoiboi, where hundreds of workers from the Digoiboi Refinery gathered outside the refinery premises to join the protest. Demonstrators warned that the agitation could intensify if their demands were not addressed by the Centre.

"This protest is to make it clear that we will not remain silent. The labour codes the government wants to im-

plement will deprive workers of their rights. Today, workers have stopped their work to show their support," said Nagen Chutia, General Secretary of the Petroleum and Gas Workers Federation of India in Digoiboi.

Chutia added that further agitation was likely if the government did not reconsider the reforms. "The government is trying to turn industries into private enterprises and has consistently ignored the concerns of common people," he alleged.

The strike call has been backed by major trade unions, including the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), All India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC), Trade Union Coordination Centre (TUCC), Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICTU), Labour Progressive Federation (LPF) and United Trade Union Congress (UTUC). The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has also extended support to the bandh, with several farmer bodies expressing solidarity with the workers' demands.

NSCN (IM) Accuses Security Forces, Kuki Militants of 'Scorched-Earth Tactics' in Litan

IMPHAL

The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) [NSCN (IM)] has accused Indian security forces and Kuki militants of carrying out what it described as "scorched-earth tactics" in Litan area of Ukhrul district, alleging that the recent violence amounted to a targeted attack on Tangkhul Naga communities.

In a statement issued to the media, the NSCN (IM) termed the incidents in Litan between February 8 and February 10 as a "symbol of aggression against the Naga Nation," claiming that homes belonging to Tangkhul Nagas were deliberately set ablaze.

According to reports, the violence led to the destruction of around 50 houses and several government quarters in Litan Sareikhong village and nearby localities under the jurisdiction of Litan police station.

Allegations of Premeditated Arson
The outfit alleged that a minor altercation where Kuki individuals reportedly assaulted a Tangkhul Naga youth was used as a pretext to launch attacks on Tangkhul homes.

It further claimed that the version of events presented by certain Kuki organisations "does not reflect the truth" and alleged that the destruction was a "premeditated arson committed by Kuki militants against the Tangkhul Nagas."

The NSCN (IM) also accused the World Kuki-Go Intellectual Council (WKZIC) of attempting to portray itself as a victim in the aftermath of the violence and of misleading national leadership regarding the ground situation.

Alleged Role of Security Forces
In a serious allegation, the NSCN (IM) claimed that security personnel were

seen participating alongside Kuki militants during the incidents, with some individuals allegedly wearing masks to conceal their identities.

The group alleged that this suggested tacit backing from security agencies and claimed that Kuki militants had acted with a "green signal" from India's Ministry of Home Affairs. It described the alleged collusion as "appalling" and a "grave violation of human rights."

These claims have not been independently verified, and there has been no official response from security agencies or the Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the allegations at the time of filing this report.

Escalating Tensions in Ukhrul
The Litan violence has further heightened tensions in parts of Ukhrul district, which has witnessed sporadic incidents amid ongoing ethnic and political strains in Manipur.

Authorities had earlier indicated that security deployments were being strengthened in sensitive areas to prevent escalation and maintain law and order. Police sources previously stated that investigations into the incidents were underway.

The latest statement from the NSCN (IM) adds another dimension to the unfolding situation, with accusations of institutional involvement likely to intensify political and security debates in the state.

Officials are yet to issue a detailed account of the February 8-10 incidents. Meanwhile, calls for restraint and impartial investigation into the destruction of property in Litan continue to grow amid concerns over renewed instability in the region.

India Among World's First AI-Ready Nations

NEW DELHI

India has emerged as one of the first countries globally to achieve readiness across the full artificial intelligence (AI) technology stack, supported by a young and rapidly expanding talent base, according to an official document released on Thursday.

The document states that India has made systematic progress across all five layers of the AI architecture - applications, models, chips, infrastructure and energy - positioning itself at the forefront of the global AI transformation.

"India is at the forefront of an AI-led transformation, where technology is driving productivity, innovation, and job creation," the document noted.

Demographic Advantage Fuelling AI Growth

A key pillar of India's AI preparedness is its demographic profile. With more than 65 per cent of the population under the age of 35, India has one of the youngest workforces in the world.

"This large, tech-savvy talent base can be trained and adapted for AI-driven industries, creating a strong foundation for innovation, digital services and future-ready jobs," the statement said.

The country's growing emphasis on digital literacy, coding, data science and advanced technologies has strengthened its ability to absorb and deploy AI tools across sectors.

Startups Showcase Innovation Ahead of AI Summit

In the run-up to the 'India AI Impact Summit 2026', 12 Indian AI startups selected under the Foundation Model Pillar participated in a roundtable chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, where they presented their innovations and future plans.

Assam Poll Schedule Likely by Early March; EC Yet to Decide on One or Two-Phase Voting

GUWAHATI

With the announcement of dates for the forthcoming Assam Assembly elections expected by the end of this month or in the first week of March, the State administration has already begun preparatory work, even as the Election Commission of India (ECI) weighs whether to conduct the polls in a single phase or in two phases.

Official sources told that Assembly elections in Assam have traditionally been held either in one or two phases, depending largely on security assessments and availability of Central forces. The final decision, however, rests with the Election Commission.

A key factor in determining the number of phases is the deployment of security personnel. If the polls are conducted in a single phase, the Centre would need to provide a substantial number of additional forces to ensure peaceful voting across all constituencies simultaneously.

With several other states also scheduled to go to the polls around the same time, questions remain over whether adequate Central forces can be made available for a single-phase election in Assam.

"In case of a single-phase poll, the force requirement will be significantly higher. Considering simultaneous elections in other states, availability of forces could be a challenge," a source indicated.

On the other hand, if voting is spread across two phases, security personnel deployed in the first phase can be redeployed for the second phase, reducing the total number of forces required at any given time.

This staggered approach is often adopted to optimise security arrangements without overstretching resources.

The Election Commission has already initiated ground-level assessments. A team of Commission officials recently visited Assam and held meetings with senior administrative and police officers to review preparedness and evaluate the prevailing law-and-order situation.

Further consultations are expected next month. The full Commission, led by the Chief Election Commissioner, is scheduled to visit the State on March 18. During the visit, the panel is expected to hold discussions with the Chief Secretary, the Director General of Police and representatives of recognised political parties before finalising the election schedule.

Meanwhile, the State administration has drawn up contingency plans for both scenarios - one-phase and two-phase polls. Officials have assessed force requirements under each option and are proceeding with logistical preparations to ensure smooth conduct of the elections.

Routine arrangements such as identification of polling stations, updating of electoral rolls, training of polling personnel and coordination with law enforcement agencies are already underway.

While political parties have intensified ground-level activities in anticipation of the formal announcement, the final poll schedule will hinge on the Election Commission's assessment of security, logistics and nationwide electoral commitments.

IIT Guwahati Develops Affordable System to Remove 99% Arsenic from Contaminated Water

NEW DELHI

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have developed a cost-effective water treatment technology capable of removing up to 99 per cent of arsenic from contaminated groundwater, offering a promising solution for regions grappling with toxic water supplies.

The newly developed electrocoagulation (EC) system can eliminate contaminants within minutes, making it particularly suitable for rural and semi-urban areas where access to advanced water treatment infrastructure is limited. The findings of the research have been published in the journal Separation and Purification Technology.

Addressing a Widespread Public Health Threat

With rapid industrialisation and urban expansion driving increased dependence on groundwater, arsenic contamination has emerged as a serious public health concern in many parts of the world. Arsenic can enter groundwater naturally through rock formations or through human activities such as mining and agriculture.

According to Prof. Mihir Purkait of the Department of Chemical Engineer-

ing at IIT Guwahati, long-term exposure to arsenic can result in severe health complications, including organ damage and cancer. Globally, an estimated 140 million people are exposed to unsafe levels of arsenic in drinking water, with India, Bangladesh and parts of South America among the most affected regions.

"To address this, many conventional methods have been developed. While some have been successful, they are difficult to implement in uncontrolled environments," Prof. Purkait said. He noted that most existing systems depend on chemical additives, extended treatment times and sophisticated equipment, which limit their practicality in remote or resource-constrained settings.

He further pointed out that conventional methods often generate surplus sludge and involve time- and energy-intensive disposal processes, adding to operational challenges.

A Modified Electrocoagulation Approach

Electrocoagulation offers an alternative treatment method by using an electric current instead of externally added chemicals. In this process, metal ions are released from electrodes placed in the water. These ions bind with arsenic

and other contaminants, causing them to clump together into flocs that can be removed through settling or flotation.

"The process is relatively simple to operate and reduces the need for chemical handling," Prof. Purkait explained.

Traditional EC systems, however, typically use stationary electrodes. Over time, deposits can accumulate on the electrode surface, slowing the process and reducing efficiency.

To overcome these limitations, the IIT Guwahati research team configured a modified EC system featuring a rotating anode and a stationary cathode. The rotation enhances mixing and improves mass transfer, ensuring uniform generation of iron coagulant species that effectively bind arsenic in the water.

"In this process, a controlled electric current dissolves a sacrificial iron electrode, while its rotation improves mixing and mass transfer. This leads to efficient formation of iron coagulant species that attach to arsenic," Prof. Purkait said.

During treatment, fine gas bubbles generated in the system adhere to arsenic-laden flocs and lift them to the surface, allowing easy separation. The use of rotating iron electrodes significantly improves removal efficiency while

maintaining low operational costs.

The research team highlighted the economic advantages of the new system compared to conventional water treatment technologies.

For a small community-scale plant with a capacity of 10-50 kilolitres per day, the EC system would typically cost between ₹8 lakh and ₹15 lakh. In contrast, conventional systems for similar capacities cost between ₹12 lakh and ₹20 lakh.

At medium-scale capacities of 100-500 kilolitres per day, the EC system is estimated to cost ₹30-80 lakh, while reverse osmosis (RO)-based systems often exceed ₹1-2 crore.

Operational costs are also lower, as the EC system does not require expensive membranes or frequent chemical dosing. Maintenance is largely limited to periodic electrode replacement. By comparison, membrane-based systems incur high operating expenses due to membrane fouling, frequent replacement needs and energy-intensive processes.

"The developed technology is particularly suitable for rural and semi-urban areas, where affordability, robustness and ease of operation are critical," Prof. Purkait said.

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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 702

UNDERSTANDING BUDGET 2026-27

Union Budget 2026-27 is not a Budget that grabs attention with big giveaways or dramatic announcements. At first glance, many businessmen, salaried Government employees, and private sector professionals may even wonder: "What really changed for me?" That question is understandable. This is not a Budget of surprises. It is a Budget of reassurance.

Globally, economic conditions remain uncertain. Interest rates across the world have stayed higher for longer. Inflation has eased but has not disappeared. Governments everywhere are being forced to choose carefully between spending more and borrowing responsibly. India is no exception. In this environment, the biggest risk is not doing too little, but doing too much too quickly.

Budget 2026-27 matters because it signals maturity. Instead of chasing headlines, the Government has chosen stability. It reinforces existing policies rather than replacing them. For ordinary taxpayers and business owners, this approach has a quiet but powerful benefit: you can plan your finances with greater confidence.

For salaried individuals, stability means no sudden tax shocks. For business owners, it means policy predictability. For professionals and MSMEs, it means fewer disruptions and more clarity. The underlying message is simple: the Government wants the economy to grow steadily, without putting pressure on future taxes or inflation.

This Budget is best understood not as a list of announcements, but as a continuation of a longer journey, one where credibility, discipline, and trust are given priority over short-term popularity.

Macroeconomic Picture: Why Fiscal Discipline Still Matters to You

When we hear terms like fiscal deficit, government borrowing, or capital expenditure, they can sound distant from everyday life. But they affect everyone.

Budget 2026-27 continues the Government's effort to reduce the fiscal deficit gradually. In simple terms, this means the Government is trying not to spend far more than it earns. Why does this matter? Because excessive borrowing today often leads to higher taxes or inflation tomorrow.

One positive trend that continues is the focus on capital expenditure: spending on roads, railways, ports, housing, and urban infrastructure. Unlike short-term freebies, this kind of spending creates jobs, improves connectivity, and supports businesses indirectly. A new highway helps transporters, manufacturers, traders, and even salaried workers by reducing travel time and costs.

The Government has also been careful with its borrowing plans. By not flooding the market with excessive borrowing, it helps keep interest rates relatively stable. This matters for home loans, business loans, and working capital finance.

Fiscal discipline is not about austerity. It is about balance. Budget 2026-27 sends a clear message: growth will be supported, but not at the cost of long-term stability. For households and businesses, this reduces the risk of sudden policy reversals later.

Tax Stability: Why "No Change" Is Actually Good News

For most salaried employees and small business owners, the biggest relief in Budget 2026-27 is what did not change. Income tax slabs under both the old and new regimes have been continued. There are no surprises, no last-minute adjustments, and no complicated restructuring.

This stability is important. Frequent changes in tax rules make financial planning difficult. When tax systems keep shifting, people delay investments, postpone purchases, and hesitate to commit capital. By maintaining the existing structure, the Government is encouraging confidence.

For salaried government and private sector employees, this means you can continue planning your savings, investments, and insurance without rewriting your calculations. For business owners, it means predictability in cash flows and profit planning.

The message here is clear: compliance and trust are more important than short-term revenue. A stable tax environment encourages people to stay within the system rather than look for ways around it.

What Changed in Taxes: Small Tweaks, Not Big Shocks

While headline tax rates remain the same, Budget 2026-27 introduces some fine-tuning that affects specific groups.

Corporate tax provisions have been simplified in certain areas, reducing anomalies that caused confusion earlier. These changes help companies align tax payments more closely with real economic activity rather than technical structures.

There are also adjustments related to buy-backs and certain capital transactions. These changes aim to close loopholes and ensure fairness across different methods of distributing profits. Businesses may need to review their structures, but the intent is clarity, not increased burden.

For individuals and small businesses involved in foreign transactions, rationalisation of tax collection and remittance procedures reduces paperwork and confusion. Compliance timelines have also been adjusted to be more practical.

In summary, these are course corrections. They require awareness and adaptation, but they do not alter the basic tax landscape. For most people, the impact will be manageable rather than disruptive.

Businesses and MSMEs: Steady Support, Realistic Expectations

MSMEs remain at the centre of India's employment story, and Budget 2026-27 continues to support them quietly but consistently.

Credit access remains a major challenge for small businesses, especially outside large cities. The Budget strengthens credit support mechanisms and growth funds, aiming to improve working capital availability. However, money alone will not solve the problem. How banks assess risk and how quickly credit reaches genuine businesses will determine success.

Infrastructure spending has a strong indirect impact on MSMEs. Better roads reduce transport costs. Improved logistics help manufacturers reach new markets. Contractors, traders, and service providers benefit when public projects move faster.

The Budget also acknowledges the importance of non-metro and aspirational regions. Growth cannot remain limited to a few urban centres. For businesses in smaller towns, this focus creates long-term opportunity-but patience will be required.

Infrastructure and Manufacturing: Laying the Groundwork

Infrastructure continues to be the backbone of India's growth strategy. Budget 2026-27 builds on existing momentum rather than launching new experiments.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Either you decide to stay in the shallow end of the pool or you go out in the ocean." - Christopher Reeve

In Bengal, state BJP leaders are still failing to combat TMC



Defeating Mamata Banerjee led Trinamool Congress by BJP in West Bengal is easier said than done even as BJP leaders are speaking of government formation after the assembly elections in April/May this year. Having failed to sweep successive Lok Sabha and Bidhan Sabha elections despite pulling out all stops the saffron camp's hopes of winning 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections rest on anti-incumbency, pan-Bengal Hindu consolidation and a narrative alleging TMC corruption.

Based on these issues, the campaign of the BJP in the poll bound state will be pitted against the charisma of TMC supremo and chief minister, Mamata Banerjee and the populist projects of her government which had paid her rich electoral dividends. Overcoming these poll platforms of TMC will be toughest electoral test yet for the saffron camp.

Flinging allegations of corruption at the TMC-run state government appears to be the best bet for the BJP as it is about to hit the campaign trail. The cash for job charge and the incriminating bundles of cash recovered from the house of the companion of former TMC secretary general and education minister, Partha Chattopadhyay and the rape and murder of a lady doctor of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital have placed TMC leadership on a sticky wicket.

Coupled with it, the saffron camp has in its sights the anti-incumbency factor and consolidation of Hindu votes. The anti-incumbency factor is nullified as the state saffron camp lacks a leader who can be projected as the CM face.

The saffron camp has not got its Hindu votes equation right. The

community may not be enamoured of the ruling dispensation but it is unlikely to vote en masse for the BJP.

Though leader of the Opposition, Suwendu Adhikari is by far the most popular and visible BJP leader, he has his detractors in his own camp. Several senior state leaders have pointed out to the national leadership that they have been in the party when Adhikari had been Mamata Banerjee principal lieutenant.

Moreover, the TMC is organisationally way ahead of the BJP. The organisational network of the Trinamool saw the party through though Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah may have dropped in the state and fuelled the poll fever on earlier occasions.

Things have come to such a pass that the saffron camp could not deploy a leader from the state to tone up the organisational flab. It hand-picked Union minister Bhupendra Yadav last September and entrusted him to make the party poll ready.

The man from the central leadership started to boost the party's grassroots network. But state saffron camp sources stated that Yadav found the time insufficient for the task allotted to him.

The state BJP does not have enough booth level activists whose presence or absence can spell victory or defeat of a nominee on the polling day, sources stated. The number of legislators in the saffron camp would have been more had these activists stayed out on the polling day in 2021 Assembly elections.

Meanwhile, the Trinamool supremo in a continuation of her 2021 playbook continues to refer to BJP activists and leaders as 'outsiders.' In the backdrop of Special Intensive Revision (SIR), none like to be tagged an "outsider" in poll bound West

Bengal.

Desertions have already deleted the number of BJP legislators. Mamata Banerjee's charisma and TMC's three straight victories will not make too many individuals eager to contest as saffron camp nominees in the coming elections.

Concern over SIR and a split in the BJP leadership in the Matua community is likely to cost BJP dear in the coming election. There has been a public spat between BJP MP and Union minister Shantanu Thakur and his brother, Subrata Thakur, a BJP MLA.

The Matuas are a Dalit religious group spread over several parts of West Bengal whose block support led to spectacular poll results of BJP in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. They have been a bulwark of the saffron camp and its performance though it is doubtful whether it can be repeated.

The saffron camp cheer leaders seem to be depending on too many ifs and buts. Some of the head honchos of the state BJP feel that several Muslim groups unhappy at the TMC failure to prevent them from being dropped from the Other Backward Castes (OBC) list will vote for the BJP.

But in pursuit of this thinking, these leaders have overlooked their own narrative of tagging several portions of the minority community as "outsiders" and "infiltrators". In the event, even if these groups change their political allegiance, the saffron camp will be the last outfit they will vote for.

These groups are apprehensive of being excluded from the voter list during the ongoing SIR exercise. Given their past experience with BJP, they feel that they will get short shrift once the saffron camp comes to power.

The TMC supremo has been accused of theatrics after she pleaded

the allegation of harassment of the people of West Bengal during SIR exercise. But her appearance in Supreme Court carried a message to her voters which is likely to be reflected in their choice when they exercise their franchise.

The message of the Mamata Banerjee government after it hiked spending in women's welfare scheme is one of cooperation. The women voters receiving the enhanced in women centric cash benefit projects are unlikely to vote against their benefactor, the TMC; a fact which the BJP leaders admit in private. The BJP high command is screening the list of party candidates for West Bengal. The final picture will emerge only in the last week of this month. Once the candidates names are announced officially, the poll campaign will be started by the BJP in full swing.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

The middle class is being sandwiched between the rich class and the poor class. The middle class is caught between rising costs and rising taxes. For the middle class, this Budget had one message. Carry on as you were. In Parliament, I pointed out that there was no revision in income tax slabs and no increase in standard deduction, despite stagnant salaries and inflation at 6.8%. I urged the Finance Minister to correct this in this Budget itself by raising the standard deduction from ₹75,000 to ₹1.5 lakh for the salaried class. Meanwhile, household costs keep climbing. Education 8% □, healthcare 9% □, rent 7% □, food 6% □, transport 5% □. For the first time in years, personal income tax collections are higher than corporate tax. Individuals paid around ₹11 lakh crore, corporates about ₹9.8 lakh crore. Either give tax relief, or give investment savings & incentives so the middle class can save more and build wealth.

~ Raghav Chadha, MP(RS), National Spokesperson AAP



ETHNIC NATIONALISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

CHINGTHANG NAMBAM

After the end of the Cold War era, Europe's Balkan region became one of the first major victims of ethnic conflict. The Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, also known as the Yugoslav Wars, were among the deadliest conflicts in Europe since the Second World War. The Balkan war that began in 1991 resulted in the deaths of more than 140,000 people, with another 100,000 injured. The Yugoslav conflict led to a major humanitarian and refugee crisis.

Many analysts argue that the rise of ethnic nationalism and demands for greater ethnic states were major factors behind the breakup of Yugoslavia into six countries — Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia. The conflicts, which started in 1991 and lasted until 2001, resulted in the disintegration of Yugoslavia, massive humanitarian crises, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, large-scale displacement, and severe economic damage to the region.

The United Nations has described ethnic conflicts as one of the major threats to international peace and security because of their devastating consequences. The deep-rooted trauma, hatred, and sense of victimhood created by



such conflicts remain like buried active landmines, capable of exploding at any moment when someone knowingly or unknowingly steps on them.

Northeast India is a region of multi-ethnic diversity with complex political dynamics. Since the 1990s, ethnic clashes have occurred in different states of the Northeast. Some notable incidents include the Bodo-immigrant population conflicts (1990-2012), Mizo-Bru (Reang) conflict in 1997, Naga-Kuki clashes in 1993, Kuki-Karbi conflict in 2003, Kuki-Paite conflict in 1997, Meitei-Meitei Pangal conflict in 1993, and the recent Manipur conflict of 2023.

Since the 1990s, ethnic conflicts in Northeast India have shifted from broader anti-state insurgency or secessionist movements to intense inter-ethnic conflicts involving competition over homeland demands, greater autonomy, claims and rejection of territories, and political representation. The consequences so far have been only suffering, polarization of communities, economic damage, and humanitarian crises. Not a single community has truly benefited or achieved lasting gains from these episodes of ethnic conflict.

Some scholars and intellectuals have described Northeast India as

a geo-politically strategic hotspot and India's gateway to Southeast Asia for trade, economy, and other engagements. However, despite this strategic importance, the people of Northeast India continue to face neglect, with the region often treated merely as a strategic zone for larger national interests. Only a few well-connected individuals appear comfortable with decisions, projects, and plans imposed from Delhi.

Most people of the Northeast continue to be devalued and stigmatized for their physical features, culture, and food habits, despite the region's significant contributions in sports, culture, and national service.

Lastly, in my opinion, lasting peace in the Northeast region requires recognition of the historical background and cultural significance of the Northeastern states, along with a positive and sincere approach by Delhi to resolve long-standing political issues. The Northeast should not be treated as expendable states in India's geo-political games.

The writer is Publicity Secretary of Uripok Apunba Lup (UAL) and Secretary of Uripok Tourangbam Leikai Welfare Organisation (UTWO).

Tripura Leads Rural Development Rankings; Congress a 'Market of Lies and Illusion', Says Shivraj Singh Chouhan

AGARTALA

Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday lauded Tripura's performance in implementing key rural development schemes, describing the state as a national frontrunner while launching a sharp attack on the Congress, calling it a "market of lies and illusion."

Addressing a press conference and later a Public Representatives' Conference in Agartala, Chouhan highlighted what he termed "remarkable achievements" by Tripura under various centrally sponsored schemes. He credited both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Manik Saha for the state's progress, asserting that effective utilisation of funds and transparent implementation had placed Tripura at the top of rural development charts.

Near-Total Housing Target Achieved
The Union Minister said Tripura has achieved nearly 99 per cent completion

under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) in the rural segment, completing 3.76 lakh houses.

"Under PM Awas Yojana, 3.76 lakh houses have been completed, which is around 99 per cent. This is the only state which has achieved this," Chouhan said, describing the performance as exemplary.

He also pointed to achievements under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), noting that rural connectivity has improved significantly. Additionally, he stated that the state has successfully created 1.08 lakh "Lakshmi Didis" - women who have achieved an annual income of at least ₹1 lakh through self-help group initiatives - meeting the set targets.

"In other schemes also, Tripura's performance is very good," he added.

Speaking at Swami Vivekananda Maidan, Chouhan praised the implementation of the VB GRAM G scheme, describing it as a transformative initiative for rural welfare. He announced that the

number of guaranteed mandays under the scheme would be increased from 100 to 125 days, a move aimed at enhancing rural employment opportunities.

"The mandays were 100 days; now they will be 125 days. The budget was ₹1,51,282 crore with central and state share. Last year it was ₹86,000 crore, so that we can provide the mandays," he said.

While discussing earlier rural employment programmes, the Minister alleged widespread irregularities under the previous MNREGA regime in several states.

"In the old MNREGA scheme in many states, corruption was rampant. One work used to be done multiple times," he claimed.

He emphasised that effective monitoring and proper utilisation of funds could transform rural infrastructure, including water conservation and asset creation.

"If we utilise the funds properly, we can develop villages - saving water, creating Amrit Sarovars, check dams, infra-

structure, water bodies, schools, roads. Many works can be done. These works will be decided by the Gram Sabha," Chouhan said, underlining the importance of decentralised planning.

Agricultural Roadmap and New Allotments

Beyond rural employment and housing, Chouhan focused extensively on strengthening Tripura's agricultural sector. He announced that a team of scientists from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and officials from the Ministry of Agriculture would soon visit the state to assess local agro-climatic conditions and formulate a comprehensive agricultural roadmap.

He described the initiative as "another step to double the income of farmers."

Highlighting Tripura's potential in horticulture, particularly pineapple, lemon, and scented lemon cultivation, the Minister announced fresh financial allocations to support agricultural growth.

"₹60 crore more has been allocated under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana for Tripura to complete the work by March. ₹4 crore has been allocated for the Dalhan Mission," he said.

Chouhan also indicated that the Centre is considering a proposal from the state government to connect 108 additional rural villages with road infrastructure. "Tripura has sent a proposal to connect 108 more rural villages with roads. We will soon accept this," he said.

Political Attack on Congress

In a pointed political remark, Chouhan criticised the Congress for what he described as repeatedly renaming rural employment schemes for political purposes.

"It was known as Sampurna Gramin Rojgar Yojana, then renamed Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, then it became MNREGA. So is it an insult to Jawaharlal Nehru?" he asked.

Accusing the opposition party of misleading people, he said, "These Congress

people tell lies and mislead people. Congress is a shop of lies, a market of illusion."

His comments reflect the broader political debate over the effectiveness, transparency, and branding of rural welfare schemes, with the BJP often asserting that current programmes are more efficiently implemented and less prone to corruption.

Emphasis on Governance and Accountability

Chouhan reiterated that development outcomes depend on accountable governance and active participation at the grassroots level. He stressed that Gram Sabhas would play a key role in identifying and prioritising works under rural employment schemes.

"This scheme is very good for the welfare of labourers and farmers. I want to thank PM Modi. Today, I held a discussion with Chief Minister Manik Saha. Under his leadership and with the blessings of PM Modi, Tripura is rapidly progressing," he said.

Hindu Sammelan held at Thangmeiband in Imphal



IMPHAL

Hindu Sammelan with the theme Ekta, Sadbhav, & Sanatan Sanskriti was held here today afternoon.

The program was organised by RSS Thangmeiband Upanagar where the local MLA Kh. Joykisan graced as Chief Guest of the event along with other state functionaries.

The speaker deliberated on the rich cultural need to preserve the Sanatan way of life and the uniqueness of Vaishvi culture of Manipur society.

They also stressed on protecting the environment and nature. The speakers highlighted the need for Hindu movement in the society as well as co-exist with other religion.

It is also important to unite as a Hindu society and preserve the age old trading taking into account the indigenous belief system.

A cultural functions was held during the program highlighting the diverse culture of Manipur.

3 Muslim declared foreigners expelled by D C K A

SUSHANTA ROY

DIPHU: The Karbi Anglong district administration has issued another expulsion order against three individuals declared as foreigners by the Foreigners' Tribunal (FT) in the district. The orders by newly appointed District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia, IAS on February 10, 2026, directed the three to leave the territory of Assam and India within 24 hours of receiving the notice. The identified foreigners are, Md. Tajuddin, son of Md. Abdul Kalam, resident of Lengri village. He was declared a foreigner by the FT Court vide FT Case No. 144/2009 (reference Case No. 200/2008 from SSP (B), Karbi Anglong).

Md. Khurshed Ali, son of Late Jubed Ali, resident of Dodo Colony. Declared a foreigner vide FT Case No. 239/2008 (reference Case No. 288/2007) and Md. Amir Husain, son of Late Nur Islam, resident of Tila Basti.

All declared foreigners are under Khatkhathi Police Station. Declared a foreigner vide FT Case No. 147/2009 (reference Case No. 229/2008). Citing Section 2 of the

Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, the orders state that their presence in India/Assam is detrimental to the interests of the general public and the internal security of the state. They have been instructed to exit via the Dhubri, Sribhumi (Karimganj) or South Salmara-Mankachar route (bordering areas). In case of non-compliance, the government warned it would take appropriate action to enforce removal under the Act.

Copies of the orders have been sent to relevant authorities, including, the Senior Superintendent of Police, Karbi Anglong, for execution and compliance reporting; the Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) for confiscation of any movable/immovable property in favor of the government. Electoral Registration Officers have been directed to delete their names from voter lists; supply department to cancel ration cards; UIDAI to cancel/freeze AADHAAR cards and all district department heads to exclude them from government social security schemes/grants.

GUWAHATI

The final electoral roll published after the Special Revision (SR) exercise in Assam has revealed marked district-wise variations, with several Muslim-majority districts recording an increase in voter numbers, while most tribal-dominated and upper Assam districts witnessed a decline compared to the draft roll.

Data available on the website of the Chief Electoral Officer indicates that 24 out of Assam's 35 districts registered a reduction in electors in the final list, while 11 districts saw an increase. The changes range from marginal fluctuations of a few hundred voters to shifts exceeding 30,000 names.

In western and lower Assam, districts with significant

Muslim populations - including Dhubri, South Salmara, Goalpara and Barpeta - reported a rise in the number of electors. The increase varied from around 200 voters in South Salmara to over 25,000 in Barpeta. In central Assam, Morigaon and Nagaon also recorded growth in voter strength, while Darrang and Hojai saw a decline. In the Barak Valley region, trends were mixed. Cachar and Sribhumi registered a dip in voter numbers, whereas Hailkandi reported an increase in the final roll.

In contrast, all three hill districts - Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong - which fall under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, recorded a decrease in electoral strength. The five districts under the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), also governed under Sixth Sched-

ule provisions, similarly saw a drop in voter numbers compared to the draft roll.

Kamrup and Kamrup (Metropolitan), which includes Guwahati, also witnessed a reduction in electors. In eastern or upper Assam and the adjoining northern bank districts, 10 of the 11 districts registered a decline, with Majuli being the only exception, posting a marginal increase of around 100 voters.

The Election Commission on Tuesday published the final electoral roll for the poll-bound state, deleting more than 2.43 lakh names from the draft list after the completion of the claims and objections process. The final roll now comprises 2.49 crore electors, marking a 0.97 per cent decrease from the draft figures.

The SR exercise had earlier sparked political controversy.

Opposition parties alleged that the revision process was being misused to target genuine citizens, particularly from minority communities. The state government, however, maintained that the exercise was conducted in accordance with established procedures.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had stated that more than five lakh complaints were submitted by BJP workers during the revision process against individuals suspected of being illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. He had also remarked that notices under the verification process were largely being served to "Miyas," a term historically used as a pejorative reference to Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam, though sections of the community have in recent years reappropriated it as a form of identity assertion.

Ex-Manipur CM Urges Rajnath Singh to Halt Construction at Historic Koirengei Airfield



OUR CORRESPONDENT

IMPHAL: A former Chief Minister of

Manipur has urged Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to step in and stop ongoing construction at the

historic Koirengei airfield, calling it a priceless World War II site that must be preserved.

In a public statement, the former Chief Minister said that between 2017 and 2025, during his tenure, he had written several times to successive Defence Ministers seeking protection of the airfield. He said the site is one of the key Allied airfields from World War II and holds deep historical value for the state and the country.

He also said that several rounds of discussions had taken place between officials of the Ministry of Defence and the Manipur government over the years. Despite this, he expressed pain that destruction and new construction activities are continuing at the site.

"It pains me deeply to see destruction and new construction continuing despite years of appeals

and discussions," he said, adding that the situation has created uneasiness among local civilians.

The former Chief Minister pointed out that more than 300 acres of land have already been donated to the Assam Rifles and are currently occupied by IGAR South. He further said that over 100 acres have been given to the Border Security Force, and these areas are located close to the Koirengei airfield.

In his appeal, he requested Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to personally intervene and ensure protection of the airfield in the larger interest of Manipur and the nation.

The issue has once again brought focus on the balance between national security infrastructure and preservation of historical heritage in the state.

Silchar-Rangiya Express Upgraded to LHB Rake, Flagged Off in Silchar



OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR: The Silchar-Rangiya Express, Train No. 15612/15611, was formally flagged off after being upgraded to a modern LHB rake, marking a key step in improving rail services in the Barak Valley region of Assam.

The upgraded Linke Hofmann Busch coaches are expected to provide better safety, improved comfort, and a smoother travel experience for passengers. The move is seen as part of the ongoing efforts to modernize railway infrastructure in the Northeast.

Speakers at the event expressed gratitude to Railway

Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and acknowledged the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the continued development of railway services in the region.

The BJP Cachar District President took part in the flagging off ceremony along with several party leaders and workers. Among those present were Rupam Saha, Dipayan Chakraborty, Joydeep Biswas, Jhalak Chakraborty, and others.

The event was attended by railway officials, party representatives, and local residents who welcomed the upgrade as a positive step for connectivity and regional growth.

Rashtriya Dalhan Aatmanirbharta Mission to Strengthen Assam's Agriculture, Says Atul Bora



GUWAHATI

Assam's agricultural sector is poised for a significant push with the rollout of the Rashtriya Dalhan Aatmanirbharta Mission, with state Agriculture Minister Atul Bora expressing confidence that the initiative will enhance pulse production and improve farmers' incomes across the state.

Speaking after a meeting with Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan during his recent visit to Guwahati, Bora said the mission's implementation in Assam was discussed in detail and would be taken forward in a structured manner.

"The Rashtriya Dalhan Aatmanirbharta Mission will significantly benefit farmers in the state. We had detailed discussions with

the Union Minister regarding its implementation. This will strengthen our agricultural sector and improve farmers' livelihoods," Bora told reporters on February 11.

Focus on Infrastructure and Farmer Support

Bora said that apart from boosting pulse production, the mission would focus on strengthening local infrastructure, including the establishment of processing facilities.

"He visited here today, and we had a discussion. There is the Rashtriya Dalhan Aatmanirbharta Mission. This will benefit the farmers. We will be able to provide mills to farmers. Under the able guidance of Prime Minister Modi, we are doing a lot of work for farmers," Bora said.

The provision of mills and processing units is expected to help farmers secure better value for their produce by reducing dependence on external markets and intermediaries. Improved local processing capacity could also reduce post-harvest losses and enhance price realisation.

The minister described the mission as a potential catalyst for transforming Assam's agricultural landscape, particularly in pulse cultivation, which holds scope for expansion in suitable agro-climatic zones of the state.

National Push for Pulse Self-Reliance

The Rashtriya Dalhan Aatmanirbharta Mission was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 11, 2025, with a total allocation of ₹11,440 crore. The mission aims to increase domestic production of pulses and reduce India's dependence on imports, thereby strengthening food secu-

urity and ensuring remunerative prices for farmers.

India has historically relied on imports to meet its pulse demand. The new mission seeks to address this gap through improved seed distribution, modern cultivation practices, infrastructure development, and enhanced procurement support.

Officials said Assam, along with other northeastern states, is expected to benefit from targeted interventions under the mission, given the region's potential for crop diversification and expansion of pulse cultivation.

A day before Bora's remarks, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan underscored the importance of the Northeast in the Union Budget, describing the region as central to India's development trajectory.

Addressing a gathering in Guwahati, Chouhan said Assam and the wider Northeast are scripting a "new chapter of development," adding that the recently presented Union Budget lays a strong foundation for building a fully developed India with special emphasis on the region.

"This budget is not just a document of figures. It opens the sky high for the dreams of 140 crore Indians to take a new flight," Chouhan said.

He stressed that the Budget should be viewed as a comprehensive roadmap rather than merely a financial statement. According to him, it provides a blueprint for strengthening every state, particularly those in the Northeast, and is designed to benefit all sections of society.

"The government has prepared a

strong roadmap for the future to achieve the vision of a fully developed India," he added.

Boost for Assam's Farmers

For Assam, the Dalhan Aatmanirbharta Mission is expected to complement existing agricultural schemes by promoting crop diversification and reducing overdependence on traditional crops. By encouraging pulse cultivation, the state can improve soil health through nitrogen fixation while also expanding income opportunities for farmers.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood source in Assam, and targeted central support is seen as crucial for addressing challenges such as fragmented landholdings, limited mechanisation, and market access constraints.

With discussions between state and Union leaders now underway, officials indicated that implementation modalities, including identification of suitable districts and farmer clusters, will be finalised in the coming months.

Bora reiterated that coordinated efforts between the Centre and the state government would be essential to ensure the mission's success.

"The initiative will bring tangible improvements to farmers' lives and help strengthen Assam's agricultural economy," he said.

As the mission rolls out, stakeholders expect it to play a pivotal role in enhancing self-reliance in pulse production while contributing to broader goals of rural prosperity and agricultural sustainability in Assam and the Northeast.

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Opposition protest against India-US trade pact outside Parliament; call it a 'trap deal'



NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha was adjourned till 12 noon on Thursday minutes after proceedings began following protests by Opposition members over the India-US interim trade deal and other issues.

As the House assembled, Speaker Krishna Prasad Tenneti, who was in the Chair, allowed Question Hour to commence amid sloganeering by Opposition MPs. Soon after, members trooped into the Well of the House, forcing the Chair to adjourn proceedings till noon.

Opposition MPs staged a protest outside Parliament at the Makar Dwar, oppos-

ing the India-US interim trade deal, which they described as a "trap deal". Holding placards, the MPs also voiced support for the Bharat Bandh called by central trade unions against various government policies.

Workers and farmers across the country participated in the nationwide strike on Thursday, protesting labour codes, trade agreements, privatisation and other measures they termed anti-worker and anti-farmer.

Congress MP Manish Tewari moved an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha, seeking a discussion on what he termed "serious concerns" arising from the

India-US interim trade deal and the joint statement.

In his notice, Tewari demanded an immediate statement from the government, alleging that the joint statement contained commitments related to Russian oil purchases and agriculture-related concessions. He said such steps could raise questions over India's energy security, farmers' interests and strategic autonomy.

"I move that this House suspend Question Hour, Zero Hour and all other listed business of the day to take up the serious concerns emanating from the USA-India Joint Statement on the Interim Trade Agreement," Tewari said in his motion.

Bharat bandh: Normal life disrupted, banking, transport services affected in some states

NEW DELHI

The nationwide strike announced by trade unions against the BJP-led central government's "anti-worker, anti-farmer and anti-national pro-corporate policies" has disrupted normal life in various states with transport and banking among services affected.

The general strike has been called by a joint forum of ten central trade unions including INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF and UTUC. The forum claimed that around 30 crore workers have been mobilised across the nation for the strike.

The protesters have demanded the scrapping of four labour codes, claiming that it weakened workers' rights, reduce job security and make it easier for employers to hire and disengage staff.

They are demanding the restoration of MGNREGA and the scrapping of the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025. The unions have also called for the withdrawal of the Draft Seed Bill and Electricity Amendment Bill, and the "Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act".

All India Trade Union Congress General Secretary Amarjeet Kaur said she has received reports of the agitation from states, including Assam, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Kerala, Odisha and Bihar, reported.

She added that processions have started in industrial areas of New Delhi and that traffic on the roads is relatively light.

Kaur said banking, insurance, postal, transport, health, coal and non-coal mines, gas pipeline and electricity sectors will be affected by the strike.

The nationwide strike disrupted normal life in Odisha with transport services being hit in places



like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Rourkela.

In the capital city, the protesters staged a blockade near Station Square, leaving passengers stranded in the railway station. Ama Bus and auto-rickshaw services were hit due to the strike. Major commercial establishments too remained closed in the state capital.

Demonstrations were also held on National Highway-16 at Jaydev Vihar, causing a traffic snarl.

Members of various trade unions in Jharkhand are staging demonstrations at the gates of various coal companies and PSUs, while the strike has hit banking, insurance and coal sectors in the state.

Left parties and the Congress have extended their support to the strike.

Normal life disrupted, transport services hit in Kerala

The strike disrupted normal life in Kerala with travellers being the most affected as KSRTC and private buses remained off the roads.

Auto-rickshaw unions also announced that they would not

operate during the strike.

"I have been waiting for a KSRTC bus since 6 am to return home to Kanjiramattom after my night duty. But no buses are operational. I will wait for a few more hours before going to the railway station to catch a local train to reach my destination," a passenger was quoted.

The disruption of transport services is also expected to affect attendance in government offices, even as the state government issued an order stating that unauthorised absence of an officer on account of the strike shall be treated as "dies non."

Nationalised banks and offices of many insurance companies remained shut in Goa. Some industrial units in the state were also affected.

"Labour unions shut down the work in different industrial estates as a mark of solidarity to the strike call," said AITUC Secretary Suhas Naik.

Naik said there was no impact on essential services.

"The public transport system worked without any problem," he said.

Meanwhile, members of labour unions held a protest march in the capital city of Panaji.

The nationwide strike failed to evoke any response in West Bengal as vehicles plied normally, and state government and private offices recorded usual turnout, reported PTI CPI(M)'s student wing SFI staged demonstrations in front of the gates of Jadavpur and Presidency universities to support the bandh call amid heavy deployment of police forces to prevent any untoward incident.

With Thursday being the first day for the state board's class 12 examinations, police and transporters ensured that the number of buses on different routes was high for candidates to reach their examination centres.

All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) general secretary Amarjeet Kaur said that no less than 30 crore workers will participate in the bandh.

INTERNATIONAL

Bangladesh polling underway for 13th Jatiya Sansad election

NAVA THAKURIA

Amid high security arrangements across the country, polling begins this morning at 7:30 am for the highly projected 13th Jatiya Sansad election in Bangladesh, where over 2000 candidates representing 50 political parties along with many independent contestants are in the fray. The Muslim majority nation has over 12.77 crore registered voters including 6.27 crore women and 1,232 third-genders, who are voting for electing 299 representatives (out of 300 seats in the national assembly). Over 42,000 polling centres will facilitate the electorate to exercise their franchise (through ballots in person) till 4:30 pm (on 12 February 2026). The election will be conducted alongside the referendum on the July National Charter, a provision for constitutional reforms, in the south Asian country.

The interim government chief Professor Muhammad Yunus urged all participating candidates to rise above personal and party interests to prioritise greater interest of the Muslim majority nation regardless of the poll-outcomes. Addressing the nation ahead of crucial electoral exercises, Nobel peace laureate Dr Yunus commented that victory as well as defeat is an integral part of democracy and hence after the election, they should dedicate themselves to build a new, just, democratic, and inclusive Bangladesh together. Chief adviser of the caretaker government also asked all voters to participate in the process enthusiastically in a festive spirit. Prof Yunus made a special appeal to the women and young voters, many of whom were deprived of the opportunity to exercise their franchise in earlier occasions, to come forward showing their commitment for a new beginning.

Nearly 400 foreign election observers including around 200 journalists representing 45 global media outlets arrived in the south Asian nation. On 12th parliament



face various threats and hence the interim government, election commission and other responsible law enforcement agencies should take effective measures to guarantee adequate security for the media professionals.

Meanwhile, the western media outlets pour views that the BNP led alliance is the front runner in the coming election and chairman Rahman is projected as the new premier of Bangladesh. When Rahman returned to his home country on 25 December ending a self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom for 17 years, he was greeted by millions of people. The son of former Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman and former premier Khaleda Zia responded to the public with a visionary line 'I have a plan' imitating the historic speech (I Have a Dream) of Martin Luther King Jr in 1963. Bangladesh's first female head of the government Begum Zia died on 30 December at the age of 80, following which he received pouring condolences from sympathizers amid the government declaring three days of state mourning. The US-based news magazine The Diplomat recently carried an analytical piece predicting the electoral progress for Rahman to become Bangladesh's next premier. Similarly, Time magazine and Bloomberg media agency, referring to several opinion polls, projected him as the front-runner ahead of the election. Earlier, the UK-based weekly The Economist also anticipated the 60-year-old scion of a famous political family to emerge as head of the government in Dhaka. In various election rallies, Rahman promised to prioritize job creation, technical education, information technology, sports, etc. The soft spoken politician also emphasized on creating a new Bangladesh with mutual trust, respect and benefits to everyone living in a peaceful state under the rule of law and freedom of speech.

protection period' by rejecting violence, intimidation and also misuse of criminal or national-security laws. The CPJ statement argued that the risks to journalists intensified in the pre-election period across Bangladesh with continuing imprisonment of scribes on unverified charges and also longstanding impunity for violence against media professionals that contributed to a climate of fear and self-censorship.

Earlier, the Geneva-based media safety & rights body Press Emblem Campaign (PEC) condemned the murder of Bengali Hindu journalist Rana Pratap Bairagi (45) in Jessore locality on 5 January and demanded a thorough probe to book the culprits and punish them under the law. Moreover, at least 12 Bangladeshi journalists sustained injuries in an attack by extortionists in Narsingdi on 26 January. Denouncing the incident, PEC chairman Blaise Lempem urged Dhaka to bring the group of extortionists to justice. Bangladesh Editors' Council also called on the authorities to ensure the safety and security of journalists during the election period. The council in a statement argued that the working journalists while gathering information during elections often

U.S. House votes to slap back Trump's tariffs on Canada

WASHINGTON

The House has voted to slap back President Donald Trump's tariffs on Canada, a rare if largely symbolic rebuke of the White House agenda as Republicans joined Democrats over the objections of GOP leadership.

Wednesday's tally, 219-211, was among the first times the House, controlled by Republicans, has confronted the President over a signature policy. The resolution seeks to end the national emergency Mr. Trump declared to impose the tariffs, though actually undoing the policy would require support from Mr. Trump himself, which is highly unlikely. The resolution next goes to the Senate.

Mr. Trump believes in the power of tariffs to force U.S. trade partners to the negotiating table. But lawmakers are facing unrest back home from businesses caught in the trade wars and constituents navigating pocketbook issues and high prices.

"Today's vote is simple, very simple: Will you vote to lower the cost of living for the American family or will you keep prices high out of loyalty to one person — Donald J. Trump?" said Rep. Gregory Meeks of New York, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, who authored the resolution.

The high-stakes moment provides a snapshot of the House's unease with the president's direction, especially ahead of the midterm elections as economic issues resonate among voters. The Senate has already voted to reject Trump's tariffs on Canada and other countries in a show of displeasure. But both chambers would have to approve the tariff rollbacks and send the resolution to Trump for the president's signature — or veto.

intensifying a feud with the long-time U.S. ally and Prime Minister Mark Carney.

House Speaker Mike Johnson tried to prevent this showdown.

Johnson insisted lawmakers wait for a pending Supreme Court ruling in a lawsuit about the tariffs. He engineered a complicated rules change to prevent floor action. But Johnson's strategy collapsed on late Tuesday (February 10, 2026), as Republicans peeled off during a procedural vote to ensure the Democratic measure was able to advance.

"The President's trade policies have been of great benefit," Johnson, R-La., had said. "And I think the sentiment is that we allow a little more runway for this to be worked out between the executive branch and the judicial branch." On late Tuesday evening (February 10, 2026), Johnson could be seen speaking to holdout Republican lawmakers as the GOP leadership team struggled to shore up support during a lengthy procedural vote, but the numbers lined up against him. "We're disappointed in what the people have done," Kevin Hassett, the director of the White House's National Economic Council, told reporters at the White House on Wednesday morning (February 11, 2026). "The president will make sure they don't repeal his tariffs."

The resolution put forward by Mr. Meeks would terminate the national emergency that Mr. Trump declared a year ago as one of his executive orders.

The administration claimed illicit drug flow from Canada constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat that allows the president to slap on tariffs on imported goods outside the terms of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement. The Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Brian Mast of Florida, said the drug flow ofentanyl into the U.S. is a dire nation-

al emergency and the policy must be left in place.

"Let's be clear about what this resolution is and what it's not. It's not a debate about tariffs. You can talk about those, but that's not really what it is," Mast said. "This is Democrats trying to ignore that there is a fentanyl crisis." Experts say fentanyl produced by cartels in Mexico is largely smuggled into the U.S. from land crossings in California and Arizona. Fentanyl is also made in Canada and smuggled into the U.S., but to a much lesser extent.

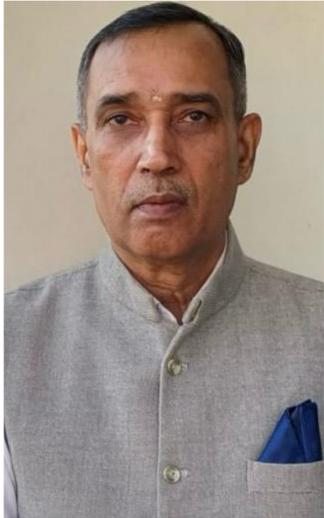
Ahead of voting, some rank-and-file Republican lawmakers expressed unease over the choices ahead as Democrats — and a few renegade Republicans — impressed on their colleagues the need to flex their power as the legislative branch rather than ceding so much power to the president to take authority over trade and tariff policy.

Rep. Don Bacon, R-Nebr., said he was persuaded by Johnson's call to wait until the Supreme Court makes its decision about the legality of Trump's tariffs.

"Why doesn't the Congress stand on its own two feet and say that we're an independent branch?" Mr. Bacon said. "We should defend our authorities. I hope the Supreme Court does, but if we don't do it, shame on us." Mr. Bacon, who is retiring rather than facing re-election, also argued that tariffs are bad economic policy. Other Republicans said they were still making up their minds after Johnson's gambit — which would have paused the calendar days to prevent the measure from coming forward — was turned back. "At the end of the day, we're going to have to support our President," said Rep. Keith Self, R-Texas.

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., said he doesn't want to tie the president's hands on trade and is ready to support the tariffs on Canada "at this time".

Act East, Skill East: Empowering 10 Million Youth Through Tourism and Entrepreneurship



The North East has a youth population between the age group of 18 to 30 of about 10 million. Hospitality and tourism have a great scope of employment and entrepreneurship in the North Eastern states. Tourism and hospitality have a wide scope for skilled manpower in the Seven Sister states, and entrepreneurship can open new doors for economic growth. The Northeast India offers huge skill potential for youth in tourism and hospitality, leveraging its rich culture, biodiversity, and the focus of the Act East policy. There is a growing need for skills in culinary arts, food and beverage service, digital marketing, guiding in local and eco tourism, event planning, homestays, and sustainable practices. These skills can bridge gaps in infrastructure and standardized training, driving economic growth and local entrepreneurship.

In the area of cultural and niche tourism, local cuisine and culinary skills play a major role in developing unique food experiences, which are a strong attraction for tourists. Storytelling and guiding skills related to local history, folklore, eco tourism, and bird watching are also important. Knowledge of craft and textiles helps in promoting local handicrafts through tourism experiences. These areas not only preserve tradition but also create income opportunities for local youth.

Hospitality operations also offer strong employment potential. Food and beverage service, including professional service standards, barista skills, and mixology, are in demand. Front office and housekeeping require standardized and quality service delivery to meet growing tourist expectations. Event and experience management, such as organizing festivals, adventure trips, and cultural events, can further strengthen tourism activities in the region.

Digital and entrepreneurial skills are equally important. Digital marketing and content creation can help promote Northeast destinations through social media and travel blogging. Entrepreneurship opportunities such as starting homestays, eco lodges, and local tour operations can boost self employment



ment and local businesses. Sustainable



and green skills are essential for eco tourism practices, waste management, and conservation, especially in ecologically sensitive areas of the Northeast.

Youth in the age group of 18 to 29 have natural advantages. They are adaptable and digitally fluent, making it easier for them to adopt new technologies and trends. Their energy and innovative mindset can drive new tourism products and fresh approaches. Their deep cultural connection gives them an authentic understanding of local traditions, which is crucial for meaningful tourism experiences.

However, there are industry needs and gaps. Standardized training is required to bridge skill gaps in professional hospitality. Infrastructure needs improvement to match global standards. A holistic approach is necessary to integrate traditional knowledge with modern hospitality practices. Government and industry both have a strong role to play. Skill development missions such as NSDC initiatives, policy support under the Act East policy, and public private partnerships can strengthen training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

In this context, Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University is offering various courses in Culinary and Hospitality, including short term and long term programmes. Students who are studying in Class 12 or who have passed 12th in any stream can avail this opportunity at DSEU during the May June Admission 2026 session. These courses can prepare youth from the Northeast and across India with industry ready skills, professional standards, and entrepreneurial capabilities to meet the growing demands of tourism and hospitality.

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THE NORTHEAST: INDIA'S QUIET STRENGTH



RAJKUMMAR

When we speak of India, we often look west and north. We speak of Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat, Punjab. But in the far corner of the map lies a region that has shaped the country in ways both loud and silent. The Northeast is not a margin. It is a living force. Eight states. Hundreds of tribes. Dozens of languages. One deep and steady pulse.

This region has given India culture, courage, music, sport, food, ideas, and even its borders. Yet its story is still told in parts. It deserves the whole frame.

A Cultural Treasure House

The Northeast keeps India's cultural map alive.

Assam's Bihu is not just a festival. It is rhythm, farming, youth, and hope woven together. Nagaland's Hornbill Festival brings tribes together in a rare show of unity. In Meghalaya, Wangala celebrates harvest with drums that echo across hills. Arunachal's Ziro Festival shows how old land and new music can share the same sky.

Handloom from Manipur and Mizoram carries stories in this thread. Bamboo craft from Tripura and Nagaland is both art and survival skill. The region does not preserve culture in museums. It lives it daily.

Even food is identity here. Fermented bamboo shoot. Smoked pork. Axone. Black rice. These are not trends. They are history on a plate.



Guardians of the Border

The Northeast holds India's eastern gate.

Arunachal Pradesh shares a long border with China. Manipur and Mizoram touch Myanmar. Nagaland also shares this fragile edge. This geography is not simple. It demands alertness. It demands trust.

The people of these states live close to international borders. They carry the weight of national security in daily life. The Assam Rifles, one of India's oldest paramilitary forces, has deep roots here. So do many regiments of the Indian Army.

Tawang is not just a monastery town. It is a reminder that culture and strategy often stand side by side.

Sporting Pride of the Nation

For years, India searched for Olympic medals. The Northeast quietly trained champions.

Mary Kom from Manipur be-

came a global boxing icon. Mirabai Chanu lifted not just weights but the country's pride. Lovlina Borgohain brought Assam into Olympic history. Baichung Bhutia gave Indian football a face the world could remember.

What explains this success? Discipline. Community support. A strong sporting culture. In many hill towns, sport is not a hobby. It is a path.

The region has shown that talent does not depend on metro cities. It grows

Digboi in Assam houses one of the oldest oil refineries in Asia. The region has coal, natural gas, limestone, and rich forests.

Bamboo from the Northeast feeds craft, paper, and building industries. Loktak Lake in Manipur sustains fishing communities and is an ecological wonder.

The region is not just scenic. It is productive.

Ecology and Climate Shield

The Northeast is one of the most biodiverse zones in the world. Kaziranga protects the one horned rhinoceros. The forests of Arunachal host rare orchids and birds. Meghalaya's living root bridges show how humans and nature can build together. In a time of climate crisis, this region is a green shield. Its rivers feed the Brahmaputra, one of India's great lifelines.

Protecting the Northeast is not charity. It is survival.

A Laboratory of Diversity

More than 200 tribes live across these eight states. Languages change every few hills. Faiths mix. Customs vary. Yet daily life moves with balance.

India often speaks of unity in diversity. The Northeast practices it.

Yes, the region has seen conflict. Insurgency, alienation, slow development. But it has also shown resilience. Peace talks. Student movements. Women led markets like Ima Keithel in Manipur. Civil society groups that refuse to give up.

The Northeast teaches India patience. It teaches listening.

The Road Ahead

Today roads are expanding. Rail lines are pushing forward. Airports are growing. Digital networks are spreading. The Act East policy sees the region as India's bridge to Southeast Asia.

But development must be careful. It must respect land and identity. The strength of the Northeast lies in its balance between modern dreams and old roots.

India's story is incomplete without this region. It is not a frontier. It is a foundation.

The hills may seem distant from Delhi. But their voice is clear. The Northeast has always given more than it has received. It stands firm, creative, and proud. And in its quiet way, it keeps shaping the idea of India.

where there is hunger and grit.

Music, Film, and Creative Fire

If you listen closely, the Northeast has its own soundtrack.

From Zubeen Garg's voice in Assam to rock bands in Imphal and Kohima, the region has shaped India's indie music space. English rock found an early home here. Choir culture is strong. Guitars are common in small towns.

Assamese cinema has produced bold stories. Filmmakers from the region often explore conflict, memory, and identity. Their films travel to global festivals.

The Northeast speaks softly, but it creates fiercely.

Tea, Oil, and Economic Backbone

India's morning tea often begins in Assam.

Assam is one of the world's largest tea producers. Its plantations support millions of livelihoods.



BARAK FESTIVAL

JANUARY 10-12, 2025

ACTIVITY PROGRAM





10 JAN
NE Cultural Fest
 Any Form of Art and Cultural showcase can be showcased here.
 The Top performances will be invited to perform in the Main Event.
 Schools, Colleges, University Department, Individual & Group Competition.



11 JAN
Adventure Sports
 Trekking & Canoe, Obstacle Navigation, Sport Climbing, Disaster Management Technique, Water Sports.
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11 JAN
Barak Valley Conclave
 Potential Issues and Challenges of Barak Valley to be discussed by stakeholders.
 Industry, NGOs, and Government can register for this important awareness & awareness program and present their proposals. Participation through invitation only. Different rewards are provided.



12 JAN
River-Climate Conclave
 Climate change will accelerate on Global Change, pollution and over-exploitation. The Conclave will focus on the importance, technical and practical of River Barak, Planning & Geography, environment and development in River Barak, Climate Change.

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



10 JAN
Media Conclave
 Media Conclave, Media Awards, Workshops, and the Film, Talks and Conferences are part of the 'Barak Festival 2025'. Theme: 'One for All, All for One'.
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10-12 JAN
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DEC'24-JAN'25
Photography
 Online Photography Contest: River Barak | NE India | Art & Culture of NE | NE Culture
 Real-Time Photography Contest of 'Barak Festival 2025'

Barak Festival
 Band Night | 10 JAN
 Musical Night | 11 JAN



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10-12 JAN
E-Sports
 Full-Blown Demos | CASH PRIZES | Trophy



11 JAN
film festival
 Award-Giving Ceremony | Film from Mizoram
 Short Films from Barak Valley, NE India, W & Media Talk | Exhibitions | Meet & Greet

10-12 JAN
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