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PERSPECTIVE

You can't see your reflection in boiling water. Similarly, you can't see the truths in your life in a state of anger.

Biren Singh Flags Issue of Fake Voters, Calls for Public Vigilance Ahead of Roll Revision

OUR REPORTER

IMPHAL: Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has said that more than 70,000 fake voters were removed from the state's electoral rolls between 2017 and 2022, stressing that the exercise was carried out in a transparent manner and placed before the House.

He noted that the process did not stop after 2022 and continued with seriousness, leading to the detection and deletion of more illegitimate entries.

Referring to the upcoming Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, Singh said it would provide another chance to examine the voter list closely and identify any remaining fake entries. He described the process as vital to protecting the integrity of democracy.

Singh urged citizens to cooperate with authorities in identifying individuals who may have entered the system unlawfully after crossing borders. He called on people to remain alert and support lawful efforts to maintain the sanctity of the electoral process.

He added that such moments test the responsibility of citizens and stressed that vigilance is necessary to prevent what he described as systematic demographic manipulation by vested interests.

WHO SAID WHAT

The decision of the Union Cabinet on alteration of the name of Kerala to Keralam reflects the will of the people of the state. It is in line with our efforts to strengthen the connect with our glorious culture. ~ Narendra Modi, PM

IMPHAL/NEW DELHI
In a high-level engagement aimed at reinforcing stability in strife-hit Manipur, Chief Minister on Tuesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, seeking sustained central support for peacebuilding, rehabilitation of displaced families and development-led normalcy across the state.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by Deputy Chief Ministers Nema Kipgen of the BJP and Losii Dikho of the Naga People's Front (NPF). The meeting, held at the Prime Minister's official residence at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg, marked Singh's first formal interaction with the Prime Minister since assuming office earlier this month.

According to sources, the discussions centred on strengthening coordination between the Centre and the State to stabilise both hill and valley districts that have witnessed prolonged unrest.

Singh briefed the Prime Minister on measures initiated by his government to restore law and order, improve security deployment, and fast-track

rehabilitation in violence-affected regions. He underscored the need for a calibrated approach combining security vigilance with economic revival and infrastructure development.

Officials indicated that the deliberations explored mechanisms to ensure long-term stability through enhanced Centre-State cooperation, particularly in intelligence-sharing, border management and community outreach initiatives.

The Chief Minister is also understood to have sought central backing for women empowerment programmes, stressing that inclusive growth and equitable opportunities across communities remain essential to rebuilding trust.

The rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) featured prominently in the talks. Thousands remain displaced following ethnic violence that disrupted normal life in several districts.

In a significant development earlier in the day, Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj



Singh Chouhan approved the construction of 5,000 houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) for violence-affected IDPs in Manipur. The move is being seen as a crucial step toward permanent resettlement and restoring dignity to displaced families.

State officials described the housing sanction as a "major milestone" in transitioning from temporary relief camps to long-term rehabilitation.

Another key proposal discussed during Singh's New Delhi visit was the raising of a Territorial Army battalion for Manipur. The idea, officials said, is to augment local security capabilities while generating employment opportu-

nities for youth.

During his visit, the Chief Minister also met Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to press for greater logistical and financial support for stabilisation measures. Discussions reportedly included resource mobilisation for infrastructure rebuilding and economic revival in affected districts.

Singh further called on BJP national president J. P. Nadda as part of what officials described as a broader round of consultations to consolidate governance and party support during a sensitive period.

In a symbolic gesture reflecting the state government's intent to deepen engagement with the Centre, Singh and his deputies extended a formal invitation to Prime Minister Modi to visit Manipur.

Observers view the invitation as both political and strategic, signalling confidence in the state's gradual return to normalcy while also seeking to reinforce the Centre's visible commitment to peace efforts.

The meeting comes amid ongoing efforts to stabilise Manipur following months of unrest that have strained administrative systems and displaced thousands. While security conditions have shown incremental improvement in some areas, sporadic tensions persist.

Government sources emphasised that the Centre remains committed to assisting Manipur in restoring order and accelerating development initiatives. Tuesday's meeting is being seen as part of a continuum of high-level engagements designed to align policy, funding and security strategies.

As the state embarks on what officials describe as a "recovery and reconciliation phase," the success of rehabilitation measures, restoration of livelihoods and sustained security coordination will be critical in determining the pace of lasting peace.

For now, the Centre-State dialogue signals a renewed push to move beyond crisis management toward rebuilding confidence across Manipur's diverse communities.

'Targeting Northeast Will Not Be Tolerated': Rijiju



NEW DELHI

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday said he has been personally monitoring the alleged racial abuse of three women from Arunachal Pradesh in Delhi's Malviya Nagar, asserting that the government would take firm action against anyone targeting citizens from the Northeast.

Speaking on February 25, Rijiju stated that his office had been in constant touch with the victims "since day one" and had simultaneously coordinated with the Delhi Police to ensure prompt action.

"If any incident occurs in Delhi with anyone from the Northeast, we take immediate action. I have been following up personally, and arrests have been made," the minister said, adding that strict legal consequences would follow.

"Situation Has Changed"
Rijiju drew a sharp comparison between the current response system and what he described as a troubling past, when students and young professionals from the Northeast allegedly faced harassment and violence in metropolitan cities with little institutional backing.

"There was a time when our Northeast children were beaten, thrown aside,

and no one questioned it. Even the police would harass them. Today, that cannot happen," he remarked.

The minister credited reforms initiated under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying structural mechanisms have been put in place to address complaints involving people from the Northeast more effectively.

According to Rijiju, a dedicated framework within the Delhi Police now handles such cases, ensuring that complaints are registered swiftly and action is taken without delay.

Dedicated Response Mechanism
He emphasised that the existence of a specialised response mechanism has significantly improved institutional accountability. "Today, there is a system in place. Complaints are not ignored. Action is taken immediately," he said.

Rijiju further noted that the Centre maintains regular coordination with states across the country on matters concerning citizens from the Northeast. His office, he said, routinely tracks incidents not just in the national capital but elsewhere as well.

"As a senior minister, my office constantly takes action on any Northeast issue. Others may only raise demands, but we follow up and ensure accountability," he added. Reiterating that the government would not tolerate discrimination, the minister said the message was unequivocal: targeting individuals from the Northeast would invite firm legal action.

"We will teach a lesson that people from the Northeast should not be treated badly. We will do anything to protect the dignity of the Northeast," he said.

Assuring citizens from the region, Rijiju maintained that there was "no need to worry" as long as the government remained vigilant. "With the Northeast being a priority for the Prime Minister's government, it is my duty to take action. If the Northeast is targeted, action will be taken," he stated.

Manipur Governor Pays Tribute to Late MLA Vungzagin Valte at Churachandpur Residence

IMPHAL
Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Tuesday visited the residence of late MLA Vungzagin Valte in Churachandpur district to pay his last respects, as the state observed mourning for the departed legislator.

The Governor laid a wreath and offered a ceremonial shawl in honour of the mortal remains. He met members of the bereaved family and conveyed his heartfelt condolences, praying for eternal peace for the departed soul and strength for the family to endure the loss.

Security Advisor Kuldip Singh also paid homage during the visit, marking a solemn moment of tribute amid heightened emotions in the district.

Valte, 61, represented the Thanlon constituency in Churachandpur district and was associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). His passing has reignited grief and anger among sections of the tribal community, nearly three years after he was brutally assaulted during the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023.

He had been airlifted to the National Capital Region for advanced medical treatment after his condition deteriorated in recent weeks. According to sources, he succumbed to complications linked to injuries sustained in the earlier attack.

Valte was reportedly assaulted by a mob in Imphal in May 2023 while returning from a meeting with the then Chief Minister at the height of the unrest.

The violence in Manipur erupted on May 3, 2023, following protests by tribal groups against a recommendation by the Manipur High Court to consider granting Scheduled Tribe status to the Meitei community. Tribal organisations had expressed concern that such a move would dilute constitutional safeguards relating to reservations in jobs, education and legislative representation, and potentially open up protected hill lands to non-tribal ownership.

BJP Confident in 103 Seats, 40 New Faces Likely; Sarma

GUWAHATI

With the Assam Assembly elections drawing closer, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday asserted that the BJP is in a commanding position in 103 of the 126 constituencies and is likely to field around 40 new candidates in the upcoming polls. Addressing reporters on the sidelines of the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan programme in Jorhat, Sarma projected confidence in the party's electoral prospects. "This year, we have 103 good seats. Forty new faces will contest. Whether I say it or not, they will obviously come," he said, signalling a significant infusion of fresh candidates into the BJP's campaign line-up.

On alliance arithmetic, the Chief Minister said discussions are progressing with key regional partners. He confirmed that talks with the Asom Gana Parishad are ongoing, while negotiations with the Rabha Joint Forum are "almost finalised."

Sarma further indicated that discussions with the Bodoland People's Front are expected to be held before February 28, suggesting that the BJP is keen to consolidate alliances ahead of the formal announcement of poll dates. The BJP currently heads the ruling coalition in the state and is expected to rely on a calibrated seat-sharing formula to retain its dominance.

On the schedule for the Assembly elections, Sarma reiterated that his government has urged the Election Commission

of India to conduct the polls before Bohag Bihu.

"I cannot announce the election date, but we have requested the Election Commission to hold the polls before Bohag Bihu. After Bohag Bihu, the monsoon season approaches, and conducting elections during that period will be difficult," he said.

He pointed to logistical and security considerations, noting that if elections are held after the festival, security forces would face the dual challenge of managing Bihu functions and election-related duties simultaneously. "If conducted after Bihu, we would also need to deploy police personnel both at Bihu functions and for election campaigning, which would be challenging," the Chief Minister added. Responding to reports of dissatisfaction among Congress workers over the party's decision to leave several minority-dominated constituencies to its Opposition alliance partners, Sarma said the move could prove politically costly for the Congress. "There is no point denying that Congress has a strong presence in minority-dominated constituencies and a high probability of winning them," he said. He argued that if such seats are ceded to allies like the Rajiv Dal or the Asom Jatiya Parishad, the Congress could risk losing its position as the principal Opposition party in the next Assembly. Under Assembly rules, a party must secure at least 22 seats in the 126-member House to claim the post of Leader of the Opposition.

Opposition, BJP MPs Raise Concern Over 41% Unspent DoNER Funds at Parliamentary Panel Review

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

Members of Parliament across party lines voiced concern over what they described as significant under-utilisation of funds earmarked for the Northeast during a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs.

The committee convened to examine the Demands for Grants for 2026-27 relating to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). During deliberations, several MPs flagged what they termed a worrying pattern of unspent allocations over successive financial years.

According to sources present at the meeting, MPs including Sanjay Raut, Supriya Sule, Derek O'Brien, and Naveen Jindal raised the issue, contending that funds allocated for development in the Northeastern states were not being fully utilised.

Members reportedly pointed out that in 2024-25, as much as 41 per cent of the budgetary allocation to DoNER remained unspent. In the ongoing 2025-26 fiscal, the unutilised portion was



said to stand at 36 per cent. MPs argued that such gaps defeat the purpose of enhanced allocations meant to accelerate infrastructure and socio-economic growth in the region.

Sources said a letter was submitted to the committee chairperson by the Trinamool Congress, detailing concerns over both fund utilisation and scheme implementation.

The letter allegedly highlighted discrepancies between targets and

actual beneficiaries under the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, claiming that nearly 75 per cent of intended beneficiaries in the region remain uncovered. MPs urged closer scrutiny of scheme rollout mechanisms, espe-

cially in remote and conflict-affected districts.

The communication also reportedly pointed to a 25 per cent vacancy rate in sanctioned posts within the DoNER Ministry, arguing that staffing shortages could be contributing to delays in project execution and fund disbursement.

In addition, pending central disaster relief dues to West Bengal, amounting to approximately Rs 53,696 crore, were cited in the letter as an example of fiscal bottlenecks that require urgent attention.

Committee chairperson Radha Mohan Das Agrawal is understood to have directed Ministry officials present at the meeting to furnish detailed responses to the issues raised within three days.

Sources said the chairperson also informed members that the letter submitted by the TMC would be forwarded to the Union Home Ministry for its response. Officials were instructed to clarify the reasons for under-utilisation and outline corrective measures to ensure more efficient expenditure in the coming fiscal.

The panel also sought a separate, detailed note on fund utilisation in Manipur, reflecting concerns over the state's ongoing challenges and the need for targeted developmental intervention.

As per the Union Budget, the allocation for the DoNER Ministry in 2026-27 stands at Rs 6,812.3 crore, marking a substantial increase over the revised estimate of Rs 4,479.2 crore for the previous fiscal.

Of the total outlay, Rs 2,500 crore has been earmarked for the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), Rs 2,300 crore for the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE), and Rs 825 crore for schemes under the North East Council.

MPs emphasised that while higher allocations are welcome, actual implementation and timely utilisation remain critical. Several members reportedly underscored that unspent funds weaken the case for enhanced future allocations and undermine development commitments made to the region.



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TRUMP RESHAPING THE GLOBAL ORDER

Donald Trump's second-term political project, built around the idea of restoring national primacy through uncompromising "America First" policies, represents one of the most ambitious attempts in modern history to reshape not only domestic governance but also the global strategic balance. His ambition has gone far beyond conventional policy correction or partisan governance; instead, it has sought to re-engineer the relationship between state power, global institutions, trade systems, and alliance structures. Trump's core belief that nations must prioritise sovereign interests over multilateral commitments has increasingly influenced political thinking worldwide. While critics view his approach as destabilising and polarising, supporters see it as a long-overdue correction to what they perceive as decades of global overreach at the expense of domestic prosperity and national identity. The speed, scale, and intensity of his second-term decisions have convinced many observers that his objective is not incremental reform but structural transformation of how global power is exercised and negotiated. His administration has focused on shrinking federal agencies, reducing regulatory frameworks, and redirecting state spending toward domestic economic priorities. The broader ideological message being projected globally is that strong executive leadership, if aligned with nationalist economic planning, can rapidly alter the trajectory of a nation's economic and geopolitical standing.

Trade policy has become the most visible instrument of Trump's transformation agenda. Unlike his predecessors, who raided Iraq, Afghanistan directly and Libya and Syria indirectly, Trump, the magician, has established America's authority without army invasions. The aggressive tariff strategy – applied across allies and adversaries alike – has fundamentally altered global trade expectations. International forecasts suggest the global economy has shown resilience despite tariff disruptions, indicating that global trade systems are adapting rather than collapsing outright. These outcomes reflect the central paradox of Trump's strategy: disruption creates economic uncertainty, but it also forces structural adjustments across global markets. In Trump's ideological framework, disruptions are often portrayed as necessary transitional shocks required to rebuild domestic manufacturing capacity and reduce strategic dependence on geopolitical competitors. This framing has influenced other political leaders globally who are increasingly adopting domestic-first economic narratives.

The U.S. operation in Venezuela in early 2026 became one of the most dramatic demonstrations of Trump's hard-power doctrine when American forces captured President Nicolás Maduro and his wife during a military raid tied to terrorism, drugs, and weapons charges filed in the United States. The administration justified the action as a law-enforcement and national-security mission, with Trump even stating the U.S. could temporarily "run" Venezuela until a transition was ensured, though the legality and geopolitical implications were widely questioned internationally. The episode reinforced a broader message that Washington was prepared to directly intervene when it believed its security or strategic interests were threatened.

Trump's intentions toward Greenland have been framed primarily around national security and strategic dominance in the Arctic. He has openly said the United States would pursue control of Greenland "whether they like it or not", arguing that only the U.S. has the capability to protect the island from Russia or China and linking Arctic control to global security and military infrastructure such as missile defence systems. He has also refused to rule out force and used economic pressure, including tariff threats, to push Denmark and European allies toward negotiations, sparking a major diplomatic confrontation with the EU and NATO partners and fears of a broader geopolitical crisis. Trump's approach toward allies has been perhaps the most controversial component of his global strategy. Historically, U.S. alliances were framed as permanent strategic commitments based on shared values and collective security. Trump has challenged this model by treating alliances – particularly NATO – as transactional arrangements.

Through these actions, Trump has sent a stark message to both NATO and the United Nations: U.S. participation in alliances and global systems is conditional on direct national benefit. His pressure on NATO allies over defence spending and Arctic security, combined with unilateral moves like Venezuela and aggressive territorial positioning in Greenland, signals a shift toward transactional, power-centric diplomacy rather than traditional alliance-based consensus. At the same time, U.S. officials insist Washington remains committed to NATO but expects structural changes that reduce the American burden and increase allied responsibility, even as European leaders warn about long-term instability and declining trust.

Trump's policies toward adversaries have followed a similar logic of unpredictability combined with economic leverage. Rather than relying primarily on multilateral sanctions or coalition diplomacy, his approach has emphasised bilateral pressure, economic isolation, and targeted geopolitical signalling.

This has reinforced the broader message that economic power – especially control over trade access, financial systems, and technology flows – is now the primary battlefield of international competition.

The strategic implication is that future global conflicts may increasingly occur through economic instruments rather than conventional military confrontation. Trump's increasingly direct confrontation with Iran has been marked by sharp warnings, military signalling and vocal encouragement of anti-government protests, reflecting a headline "nation first" posture.

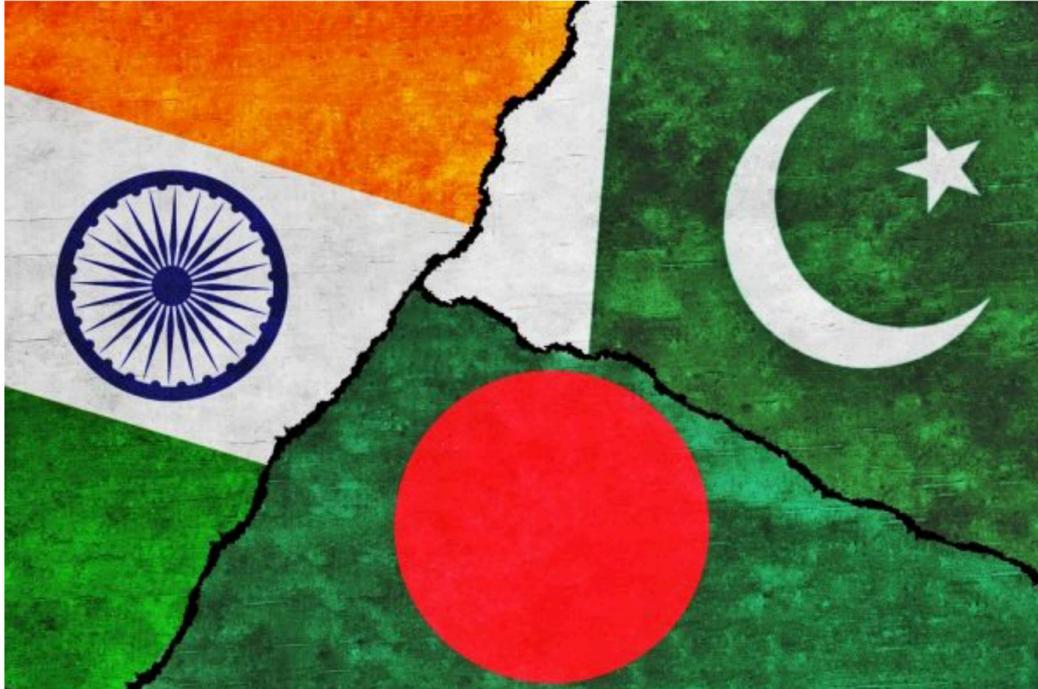
The shift toward bilateral diplomacy-negotiating directly with individual nations rather than through global frameworks-reflects a belief that direct negotiation produces clearer, more enforceable outcomes. A peek into his tariff dealing with Pakistan, Bangladesh and India clears any doubt of applying the same ideology. He has checkmated India and China with his hidden masterstrokes. Trump's political style – highly centralised messaging, rapid executive action, and constant narrative dominance – has itself become a model studied by leaders across the world. The concept that political authority must be projected continuously through decisive action rather than consensus-building has gained traction in several political systems. Whether this shift proves sustainable remains debated, but its influence is undeniable.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Don't rush anything. When the time is right it'll happen."

-Buddha

STRATEGIC RECALIBRATION OF INDIA-BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN TRIANGULAR DIPLOMACY



B S DAR

The recent electoral victory of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party opens a new democratic chapter in South Asian diplomacy, carrying the potential to recalibrate regional engagement with renewed strategic clarity and institutional pragmatism. Far from being a mere domestic political transition in Dhaka, this moment represents a significant opportunity for constructive diplomatic realignment within the India-Bangladesh-Pakistan strategic triangle. For regional policymakers and foreign affairs observers, the development means far bigger than a political shift, it indicates a defining diplomatic juncture that will decide trade corridors, border governance, intelligence coordination, and the long-term geopolitical architecture of the Bay of Bengal with heightened urgency and relevance.

From a historical standpoint, India-Bangladesh relations have never been purely ideological, they have been structurally interdependent. Geography, supply chains, river systems, and border security realities created a framework in which cooperation persisted even during political divergences. However, BNP-led governments historically adopted a more sovereignty-conscious and diversified foreign policy posture compared to the Awami League's relatively closer institutional alignment with New Delhi. The return of BNP therefore signals a recalibration. Under Awami League governance, bilateral cooperation between India and Bangladesh expanded significantly across security coordination, counter-insurgency cooperation, power trade, and connectivity infrastructure. Intelligence sharing against northeastern insurgent networks and counterterrorism coordination became deeply institutionalized mechanisms. These arrangements were not personality-driven but system-driven, which is a critical variable in assessing future continuity. Yet, BNP's ideological positioning historically emphasized strategic autonomy, calibrated nationalism, and diversified diplomatic outreach. In practical foreign policy terms, this often translated into a balancing strat-

egy involving engagement with China, selective normalization with Pakistan, and cautious negotiation with India on sensitive issues such as water sharing, border incidents, and trade asymmetry.

For India, hostility has never been the strategic concern but dilution of exclusivity. From a foreign affairs analytical perspective, the primary question is whether BNP's governance model will prioritize multi-vector diplomacy over India-centric regional integration. If that trajectory consolidates, India's eastern strategic depth could face subtle but measurable adjustments, particularly in transit cooperation, river diplomacy, and cross-border security coordination.

Pakistan's potential role in this evolving matrix requires careful institutional analysis rather than rhetorical exaggeration. Historically, Pakistan's diplomatic engagement with Bangladesh remained constrained by the unresolved historical legacy of 1971. Structural mistrust, limited economic integration, and weak defence cooperation restricted Islamabad's leverage in Dhaka's policy calculus. However, political transitions create diplomatic openings. Pakistan's strategic objective in South Asia has consistently involved reducing India's regional influence through narrative diplomacy, economic outreach, and symbolic diplomatic engagement. A BNP-led administration, while not inherently pro-Pakistan, may adopt a more open diplomatic posture that allows Islamabad incremental re-entry into Bangladesh's diplomatic ecosystem through trade discussions, cultural diplomacy, and multilateral forums. For India, the more immediate implications are linked to border and internal security frameworks. The India-Bangladesh border, one of the longest land borders in the world, requires continuous coordination on migration control, smuggling networks, and counter-insurgency logistics. During periods of weaker security synchronization in the past, Indian intelligence assessments repeatedly flagged the presence of insurgent safe havens and informal logistical corridors affecting northeastern states. If institutional security cooperation slows or becomes politically sensitive under BNP, even

marginal disruptions could have disproportionate internal security consequences for India's eastern frontier. Equally significant is the issue of water diplomacy, particularly the unresolved Teesta River agreement. Domestic political narratives in Bangladesh often frame water sharing as a sovereignty and resource equity issue. A BNP administration may adopt a firmer negotiation stance, which could introduce diplomatic friction while remaining within formal negotiation frameworks.

From a business and economic diplomacy perspective, the stakes are substantial. India is among Bangladesh's largest trading partners and a critical supplier of energy, commodities, and industrial inputs. Connectivity projects including rail corridors, inland waterways, and power grid integration represent long-term investments in regional economic architecture. Any policy recalibration that slows these projects would not only affect bilateral trade volumes but also regional logistics efficiency, especially for India's northeastern economic corridors. At the same time, Bangladesh's economic model is export-oriented and stability-dependent. This structural reality limits the feasibility of any drastic anti-India pivot. Even under diversified diplomacy, Dhaka's economic geography necessitates sustained engagement with India for transit access, energy trade, and regional connectivity. China's expanding economic footprint introduces another strategic layer. Infrastructure investments, port development, and industrial financing have already positioned China as a significant economic actor in Bangladesh. A BNP-led government historically demonstrated openness to diversified economic partnerships, which could accelerate Chinese infrastructural engagement without necessarily displacing India's economic presence. In this triangular environment, Pakistan's realistic leverage remains perception-based rather than structural. Islamabad lacks the economic scale, geographic proximity, and infrastructural integration that India possesses with Bangladesh. However, it may attempt to influence diplomatic narratives through multilateral engagement, media signaling, and strategic commu-

nication on issues such as minority rights, border incidents, and regional political discourse. Such approaches are designed to create diplomatic friction rather than structural policy shifts.

For Pakistan, the electoral shift in Bangladesh offers a symbolic diplomatic opportunity but not a strategic breakthrough. The historical memory of 1971, combined with limited economic interdependence, continues to constrain any deep bilateral alignment between Dhaka and Islamabad. Any engagement will likely remain incremental and cautious. The true diplomatic test will lie in three domains: border governance, water negotiations, and regional economic corridors. These areas directly intersect with internal security, business continuity, and long-term regional stability for both India and Bangladesh.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Three career lessons we often learn too late:

1. Promotions go to visible impact, not quiet effort
2. People respect actions and results, not titles
3. Real growth comes from feedback. Embrace criticism.

~ Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Enterprises



If diplomatic pragmatism prevails, the region could witness a balanced triangular diplomacy where Bangladesh maintains diversified partnerships without undermining core cooperation with India. If perception politics dominates, however, narrative-driven tensions could create episodic diplomatic friction that external actors, including Pakistan, may attempt to leverage.

In strategic conclusion, the BNP's electoral victory signals a phase of diplomatic recalibration within South Asia. India's likely policy response will centre on strengthened economic engagement, continued expansion of connectivity initiatives, and sustained institutional cooperation on security and border management. Pakistan may find a limited diplomatic opening in terms of engagement and dialogue with Dhaka, although structural constraints such as geography, economic asymmetry, and historical context will continue to shape the scope and depth of that engagement.

In simple terms, the next phase of regional diplomacy will depend less on political rhetoric and more on practical cooperation. Trade links, border management, security coordination, and economic interdependence will continue to guide how India and Bangladesh engage with each other, regardless of political changes in Dhaka.

(The author is Foreign Affairs Analyst)



Agartala-Kolkata Bus via Dhaka Back on Track After 15-Month Hiatus

AGARTALA

Cross-border connectivity between Tripura and West Bengal received a major boost on Tuesday as the Agartala-Kolkata bus service via Dhaka resumed operations after a suspension of nearly 15 months.

The incoming bus from Kolkata was formally received at the Akhaura Integrated Check Post (ICP) by Tripura Transport and Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury, marking the restoration of a key passenger link connecting the Northeast with eastern India through Bangladesh's capital.

The service - popularly known as the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala route - had been suspended amid strained bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh, disrupting travel, trade and medical movement between the regions.

Speaking to reporters at the ICP, Chowdhury confirmed that the bus which commenced its journey from Kolkata earlier in the week successfully reached Agartala on Tuesday.

"The Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus service has restarted after a gap of 15 months. Today's arrival signals the revival of an important transport corridor," he said.

The bus service operates under bilateral arrangements between India and Bangladesh, linking Agartala with Kolkata through Dhaka. It has long been viewed as a symbol of regional cooperation and people-to-people ties.

Chowdhury referred to recent diplomatic engagements between the two countries, noting that India had extended greetings to Bangladesh's newly elected leadership and reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening bilateral



relations.

"We share deep-rooted cultural and historical ties with Bangladesh. Though relations faced a challenging period over the past year, normalcy is gradually returning. Restoration of connectivity will further enhance trade and cultural exchanges," he said.

Officials indicated that the reopening of the route is expected to ease passenger movement and revitalise economic linkages that were disrupted during the suspension period.

The minister said the halt in bus operations had significantly affected sectors such as healthcare and tourism in

Tripura.

According to him, a sizeable number of patients from Bangladesh had previously travelled to Agartala for medical treatment in private and government hospitals. The flow of such medical travellers declined sharply after transport services were halted.

"With transport links reopening, medical travel is likely to increase again. This segment contributes substantially to Tripura's economy," he said.

Tourism, too, had taken a hit during the suspension. A considerable number of foreign visitors to Tripura traditionally come from Bangladesh, and the absence of direct bus connectivity curtailed leisure and short-term visits.

"Improved connectivity is expected to boost foreign tourist arrivals in the coming months," Chowdhury added.

The Agartala-Kolkata route via

Dhaka significantly reduces travel distance compared to the longer land route through India's Siliguri corridor. The service has historically been popular among traders, students, patients and families with cross-border ties.

With the resumption, authorities anticipate smoother passenger movement through the Akhaura ICP, a key land port facilitating bilateral transit and trade.

The minister expressed hope that easing visa and travel-related procedures would further strengthen economic engagement and people-to-people exchanges between India and Bangladesh.

The revival of the service is being seen as an encouraging step toward restoring full cross-border mobility in the region, reinforcing Tripura's strategic position as a gateway to Southeast Asia under India's Act East policy.

BJP Assam unit targets Gaurav Gogoi, says Opposition rift confined to 22 constituencies

GUWAHATI

The Assam unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday alleged that Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi is aligning with what it described as a "pro-Miya" ideological line and claimed that infighting within the Opposition is largely restricted to 22 minority-dominated constituencies in the state. Addressing a press conference at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan in Guwahati, BJP state spokesperson Kalyan Gogoi said the Congress, which once produced leaders such as Gopinath Bordoloi, Bishnuram Medhi and Bimala Prasad Chaliha, had historically championed indigenous interests. He alleged that the party's present leadership was now concentrating its political efforts in Miya-dominated constituencies. The BJP leader further claimed that the Opposition's repeated calls for unity had not translated into coordinated electoral strategies. Referring to the 2021 Assembly elections, subsequent by-elections and Panchayat polls, he alleged that despite projecting a united front, the Congress contested independently in several instances.

According to him, of the 800 applications reportedly received by the Congress from across 126 Assembly constituencies, over 600 came from minority-dominated seats such as Chenga, Dhing, Chamaria and Dalgao. He said this indicated a disproportionate concentration of the party's activities in specific regions.

Kalyan Gogoi asserted that the BJP currently maintains a strong position in 104 indigenous-majority constituencies, while internal divisions continue to affect Opposition prospects in the remaining 22 minority-dominated seats. Highlighting the party's upcoming outreach campaign, the spokesperson announced that the "Jan Ashirwad Yatra" will be conducted from February 28 to March 9 under the banner of the Assam Pradesh BJP. The first phase will cover 43 Assembly constituencies and will be led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Bodoland Territorial Council Assembly clears Rs.101.20 crore vote on account for 2026

KOKRAJHAR

The Legislative Assembly of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on Tuesday passed a ₹101.20 crore Vote on Account for the financial year 2026 during its one-day Budget Session held at the BTC Legislative Assembly, Bodoifa Nwgr in Kokrajhar.

The session was presided over by Speaker Tridib Daimari and began with Question Hour, where members from both treasury and opposition benches raised a range of public interest issues. Discussions centred on Public Health Engineering (PHE), Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backwards Classes (WPT & BC), human-elephant conflict, agriculture, education, land and revenue administration.

BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary tabled the Vote on Account Budget for 2026. The Supplementary Demand (III) for Grants under the Normal Budget was placed at ₹10,120 lakh, equivalent to ₹101.20 crore.

According to the proposal, the

allocation includes funds under the State Own Priority Development (SOPD) schemes of the Assam government along with resources mobilised from the BTC's internal revenue.

Following deliberations and discussions by members of the House, the Vote on Account was passed.

During the proceedings, the Speaker also announced the report of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) under Rule 230 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the BTC Legislative Assembly for the Budget Session (Vote on Account), 2026.

In addition, the names of members constituting the Panel of Chairmen under Rule 9(1) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the BTC Legislative Assembly were declared. The passage of the Vote on Account enables the council to meet essential expenditure requirements pending the presentation and approval of the full-fledged budget for the upcoming financial year.

BOKAJAN

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the state is set to finalise its seat-sharing arrangement by mid-March, signalling that negotiations among allies are nearing completion ahead of the upcoming elections.

Addressing reporters during his visit to Bokajan in Karbi Anglong district, Sarma said discussions between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its alliance partners are in advanced stages and that a formal announcement will be made soon.

"We are yet to decide the candidates. I think the names will be finalised by March 15-16. We are in talks with our allies. Everything is moving in the right direction. Before the election date is announced, our alliance will become official," he said.

The Chief Minister's remarks indicate the NDA's strategy to pro-



ject unity and clarity before the Election Commission announces the poll schedule.

Sarma also took aim at the proposed Opposition alliance in the state, accusing its leaders of inconsistency and lack of direction.

"They make different comments in the morning, afternoon and night, so no proper conclusion can be drawn. The opposition leaders forget what they said the previous day," he said, in a sharp attack aimed at portraying the NDA as stable in contrast to what he described as a confused Opposition camp.

Responding to queries about

NDA Seat-Sharing in Assam by Mid-March, Says Himanta; Targets Opposition Unity Bid

Congress as part of a united Opposition front.

Warning of potential political fallout in Karbi Anglong, Sarma claimed the regional party had lost public support in the hill district. "Whoever decides to go with the APHLC will sink. People here do not like the APHLC. The way they do politics, the situation will become the same again, marred by violence and protests. So the people will not vote for the APHLC and reject its allies too," he said.

Sarma's comments reflect the BJP-led NDA's broader attempt to frame the electoral contest as one between a cohesive, development-oriented alliance and what it describes as an unstable and opportunistic Opposition grouping.

With mid-March set as the tentative deadline for finalising seat-sharing arrangements and candidate lists, the coming weeks are expected to witness intensified negotiations within alliances and sharper political exchanges across Assam.

Nagaland Restores Mandatory Protected Area Permit for Foreign Visitors; Dimapur Police Issue Fresh Advisory

DIMAPUR

The Office of the Commissioner of Police, Dimapur, has reiterated that all foreign nationals intending to visit Nagaland must mandatorily obtain a Protected Area Permit (PAP), following the withdrawal of earlier relaxations under the Protected Area regime.

In a press note, the Commissioner of Police-cum-Foreigners Registration Officer (FRO), Dimapur, stated that despite repeated advisories and wide publicity, several foreign nationals continue to enter the state without securing the required permit, thereby violating existing regulations.

The relaxation granted under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958 has been officially withdrawn from Nagaland by the Ministry of Home Affairs through Circular No. 602 dated December 17, 2024, citing growing security concerns in border areas.

As a result, all foreign nationals must obtain a Protected Area Permit



from competent authorities before entering Nagaland.

Authorities empowered to issue PAP include the Ministry of Home Affairs, Indian Missions abroad, Foreigners Regional Registration Offices (FRROs), the Home Commissioner of Nagaland in Kohima, the Resident Commissioner of Nagaland in New Delhi, and the Secretary (Tourism), Government of Nagaland.

The advisory further clarified that citizens of Afghanistan, China

and Pakistan, as well as foreign nationals of origin from these countries, must obtain prior approval from the Ministry of Home Affairs before visiting Nagaland. In addition, citizens of Myanmar are also required to secure prior approval from the Ministry for the grant of a PAP.

All foreign nationals visiting the state must register with the district Foreigners Registration Officer within 24 hours of arrival.

To streamline the process and avoid delays, applications for

Protected Area Permits are to be submitted through the e-FRRO portal.

The police have directed the general public, organisations, government departments, travel agents, tour operators, hotels, guest houses, homestays, paying guest facilities and any other entities facilitating the stay of foreign nationals in Nagaland to strictly ensure compliance with the PAP requirement.

They have been instructed to verify that foreign visitors possess valid permits before arranging travel or accommodation within the state.

The Commissioner of Police has sought cooperation from all stakeholders to ensure strict adherence to the Protected Area Permit regime, emphasising that compliance is essential in the interest of security and regulatory oversight.

Officials reiterated that any violation of the permit requirements would attract action under applicable laws.

E-VITARA Launched in Silchar



BISWADEEP GUPTA

SILCHAR :The e Vitara (also styled as e-Vitara or e VITARA) is Suzuki's first mass-production battery electric vehicle (BEV), a compact/subcompact crossover SUV that revives the familiar Vitara name in fully electric form. It was unveiled globally in late 2024 and has rolled out in various markets by 2026, marking Suzuki's (and its Indian subsidiary Maruti Suzuki's) entry into the mainstream EV space.

This model was officially unveiled in Silchar at a function held in the NEXA showroom on Tuesday evening, operated by Jain Udyog, where two Rajya Sabha MPs, Kanad Pukayastha and Sushmita Dev, along with other important citizens of the city, were present to witness the new entrant in the market.

Biplab Dey, the branch head, welcomed the guests and explained the various features of the vehicle. Maruti Suzuki's e-VITARA, in India (launched February 2026), is sold under the Nexa premium channel as Maruti Suzuki's first EV. It offers innovative pricing: Battery-as-a-Service (BaaS) in-

troductory offer: Starts at 10.99 lakh (ex-showroom) + battery rental at 3.99 per km.

Outright purchase (with battery): 15.99 lakh to 20.01 lakh (ex-showroom) across variants like Delta (49kWh), Zeta, and Alpha (61kWh).

Features include Level 2 ADAS, 360-degree camera, electric sunroof, high-capacity lithium-ion batteries (operating range -30°C to 60°C), and an 8-year/160,000 km battery warranty.

Waiting period: Around 6-8 weeks as of late February 2026, with supply constraints until July 2026. Deliveries have started, and it's BN-CAP 5-star rated for safety.

Early 2026 reviews call it a solid first effort from Suzuki—rugged, capable (especially with AWD), quiet for an EV, and competitively priced.

It's praised for durability, off-road chops in AWD form, and being a straightforward, no-nonsense electric SUV.

Jain Udyog, which was the first to start a full-fledged car showroom in Barak Valley, now employs around eight hundred people in the Tripura and Barak Valley region.

IIT Guwahati Flags Groundwater Concerns in Kamakhya Corridor Project; Recommends Strict Depth Limits

GUWAHATI

The Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IIT-G) has cautioned that construction under the ₹500-crore Maa Kamakhya Access Corridor Project must strictly adhere to scientifically prescribed depth restrictions to prevent disruption of fragile groundwater systems beneath the Nilachal Hills.

The institute endorsed recommendations made by the National Institute of Hydrology (NIH), Roorkee, following a detailed geophysical and hydrological study commissioned by the Assam government after petitions were filed before the Gauhati High Court.

Fracture-Controlled Groundwater at Risk

According to the findings vetted by IIT-G, researchers mapped fracture-controlled groundwater pathways beneath the hilltop shrine complex and superimposed the proposed construction layout over these sensitive zones.

The study identified interconnected fractures at depths ranging from 1.9 metres to 10.5 metres between the upstream of the Kamakhya Temple and the area in front of the Chinnamasta Temple. Additional fractures were detected between depths of 3.9 metres and 8.1 metres within the premises of the Siddheshwar Temple.



Researchers warned that exceeding specified foundation depths could disturb natural subsurface water flow regimes, potentially impacting the hydro-geological balance of the Nilachal Hills.

Prescribed Construction Limits Based on the survey: Foundation depth between Maa

Kamakhya Temple and Chinnamasta Temple should not exceed 1.9 metres.

"Construction in front of Siddheshwar Temple must restrict foundation depth to 3.9 metres or the depth of the nearest fracture, whichever is shallower." In the playground area, foundation depth should be capped at 6.4 metres, as fractures there occur between 6.4 and 7.6

metres.

Investigators observed that the playground area comprises a 3.2 to 3.5-metre soil-fill layer of coarse sand, pebbles and clay resting over weathered rock, transitioning into hard rock at deeper levels. Any construction beyond the recommended limit could intersect fracture pathways, the report noted.

Quest!

A study found that people born in May have the lowest risk of illness and disease, while those born in October have the highest.

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NCERT Class 8 textbook lists 'corruption, case backlog, judge shortage' as key challenges in judiciary



NEWDELHI

Corruption, a massive backlog of cases, and an inadequate number of judges are among the major challenges facing India's judicial system, according to a newly released Class 8 Social Science textbook by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

The revised chapter, titled "The Role of the Judiciary in Our Society," moves beyond explaining the structure and hierarchy of courts to examine systemic issues affecting the justice delivery system.

Earlier editions of the textbook primarily focused on the organisation and functions of courts.

A dedicated section on "corruption in the judiciary" notes that judges are bound by a code of conduct

that governs not only their behaviour in court but also their conduct outside it.

"People do experience corruption at various levels of the judiciary. For the poor and the disadvantaged, this can worsen the issue of access to justice. Hence, efforts are constantly being made at the State and Union levels to build faith and increase transparency in the judicial system, including through the use of technology, and to take swift and decisive action against instances of corruption wherever they may arise," the chapter reads.

The textbook also underlines the scale of pendency across courts. It puts the number of pending cases at approximately 81,000 in the Supreme Court, 62.40 lakh in high courts, and 4.70 crore in district and subordinate courts.

Highlighting accountability mechanisms, the book refers to the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) as an established channel for lodging complaints. It states that more than 1,600 complaints were received through the mechanism between 2017 and 2021.

The textbook also quotes former Chief Justice of India B R Gavai, who in July 2025 said that instances of corruption and misconduct within the judiciary had a negative impact on public confidence.

"However, the path to rebuilding this trust lies in the swift, decisive and transparent action taken to address and resolve these issues. Transparency and accountability are democratic virtues," he is quoted as saying in the book.

Centre to launch HPV vaccination drive for girls aged 14 to prevent cancer



NEW DELHI

In a major step towards eliminating preventable cancers among women, the Union government will soon launch a nationwide human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme targeting girls aged 14 years, official sources said on Tuesday.

According to sources, the programme will use a single-shot Gardasil, a quadrivalent HPV vaccine, that provides protection against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, as well as types 6 and 11.

The drive would be a special vaccination campaign and not under the government's Universal Immunisation Programme.

It is in line with the World Health Organisation recommendations, which identify HPV vaccination as a central pillar of the Global Strategy to Eliminate Cervical Cancer.

"Strong global and Indian scientific evidence confirms that a single dose provides robust and durable protection when administered to girls in the recommended age group," an official source said.

The nationwide programme will target girls aged 14 years, an age at which the HPV vaccine offers maximum preventive benefit, well before potential exposure to the virus.

In the open market, quadrivalent Gardasil-4 is a two-dose vaccine - each costing Rs 3,927 - for girls below 15 years. For those above 15 years, three doses of the vaccine are required.

Gardasil-4 vaccine is manufactured by MSD India.

"Vaccination under the national programme will be voluntary and free of cost, ensuring equitable access across socio-economic groups. By prioritising prevention at the right age, the programme is expected to provide lifelong

protection and significantly reduce the future burden of cervical cancer in the country," the source said.

The vaccine has an excellent safety record, supported by more than 500 million doses administered globally since its introduction in 2006.

Widespread vaccination has led to substantial reductions in HPV infection, precancerous lesions, and cervical cancer incidence in several countries.

Once the vaccination programme is launched, India will join 160 countries that have introduced HPV vaccination in their national immunisation schedules. According to the source, over 90 countries are implementing single-dose HPV vaccination schedules, the source said.

HPV vaccines are among the most extensively studied vaccines worldwide, with evidence demonstrating 93 to 100 per cent effectiveness in preventing cervical cancer caused by vaccine-covered

HPV types.

"The upcoming nationwide rollout (of the vaccination programme) is a significant milestone towards achieving the vision of 'Swastha Nari', ensuring that prevention, protection, and equity form the foundation of women's healthcare in the country," an official source said.

According to data, cervical cancer remains the second most common cancer among women in India, with nearly 80,000 new cases and over 42,000 deaths reported annually.

Scientific evidence establishes that almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of Human Papillomavirus (HPV), particularly HPV types 16 and 18, which together account for more than 80 per cent of cervical cancer cases in India.

Despite being largely preventable through vaccination and early screening, cervical cancer continues to impose a heavy burden on women and families.

According to sources, the forthcoming vaccination programme directly addresses this challenge by preventing HPV infection before it can progress to cancer. The drive will be conducted at designated government health facilities, including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Primary Health Centres). All vaccination sites will be linked to 24/7 government health facilities, ensuring immediate medical support and reinforcing safety and parental confidence.

To ensure uninterrupted availability and uncompromised quality, the government has secured HPV vaccine supplies through a transparent, globally supported procurement mechanism, another official source said.

Under India's partnership with Gavi - The Vaccine Alliance, high-quality Gardasil vaccines - approved by India's drug regulator and widely used internationally - have been made available for the national programme.

"Parents and guardians across the country should come forward and ensure that their 14-year-old daughters are vaccinated against HPV once the programme is rolled out," the source said.

INTERNATIONAL

Zelenskyy says Putin has 'not broken' Ukrainians as country marks four years of Russia's all-out war

KYIV

More than a dozen senior European officials were in the Ukrainian capital on Tuesday in a show of support on the fourth anniversary of Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine—a grim milestone in a war that has killed tens of thousands of people and put European leaders on edge about the scale of Moscow's ambitions on the continent.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was defiant despite the devastating toll — insisting that Russia has not "broken Ukrainians" nor triumphed in the war.

Zelenskyy said his country has withstood the onslaught by Russia's bigger and better equipped army, which over the past year of fighting captured just 0.79% of Ukraine's territory, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

"Looking back at the beginning of the invasion and reflecting on today, we have every right to say: we have defended our independence, we have not lost our statehood," Zelenskyy said on social media, adding that Russian President Vladimir Putin has "not achieved his goals."

"He has not broken Ukrainians; he has not won this war," Zelenskyy said.

However, as the corrosive war of attrition enters its fifth year, a US-led diplomatic push to end Europe's biggest armed conflict since World War II appears no closer to finding compromises that might make a peace deal possible.

Negotiations are stuck on what happens to the Donbas, eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland which Russian forces mostly occupy but have failed to seize completely, and the terms of a postwar security arrangement that Kyiv is demanding to deter any future Russian invasion.

The number of soldiers killed, injured or missing on both sides could



reach 2 million by spring, with Russia sustaining the largest number of troop deaths for any major power in any conflict since World War II, a report last month from the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimated.

European leaders see their countries' own security at stake in Ukraine amid concerns about Putin's wider goals and has demanded its leaders be consulted in the ongoing US-brokered talks. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz wrote on X that "for four years, every day and every night has been a nightmare for the Ukrainians — and not just for them, but for us all. Because war is back in Europe."

"We will only end it by being strong together, because the fate of Ukraine is our fate," he added.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addresses the audience during a session at the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany, Saturday, Feb. 14, 2026.

Putin believes that time is on the side of his bigger army, Western officials and analysts say — and that Western support will trail off and that Ukraine's military resistance will eventually crumble.

But French President Emmanuel Macron described the war as "a triple failure for Russia: military, economic, and strategic."

The war "has strengthened NATO—the very expansion Russia sought to prevent—galvanized Europeans it hoped to weaken, and laid bare the fragility of an imperialism from another age," Macron said on X.

The war has brought widespread hardship for Ukrainian civilians. Russia's aerial attacks have devastated families and denied civilians power and running water.

It has drawn in countries far beyond Ukraine, giving the conflict a global dimension, and threatened to worsen shortages, hunger and political instability in developing countries.

While NATO countries have come to Ukraine's aid, Russia has been helped by North Korea, which has sent thousands of troops and artillery shells; Iran, which has provided drone technology; and China, which the United States and analysts say has provided machine tools and chips.

Among the European officials visiting Kyiv on Tuesday were the President of the European Council, Antonio

Costa, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and Finnish President Alexander Stubb, as well as seven prime ministers and four foreign ministers.

The only American listed among the official guests in Kyiv ceremonies was Lt. Gen. Curtis Buzzard, a US officer who represents NATO in Ukraine.

With Ukraine unable to sustain its fight against Russia without foreign help, NATO countries are now providing military help, purchasing American weapons after the Trump administration broke with earlier Washington policy and stopped giving arms to Kyiv.

The European Union has also sent financial aid, but has sometimes met with reluctance from members Hungary and Slovakia.

British Armed Forces Minister Al Carns said Russia's war on Ukraine was "the most defining conflict" in decades. "I don't think anyone of us would be able to guess (when the war started) the scale and size of what has taken place," he said.

The war has brought a "revolution in military affairs," especially through the rapid development of drone technology by both sides, according to Carns. Drones now account for the vast majority of battlefield casualties, he said.

The United Kingdom on Tuesday announced a new package of military and humanitarian support for Ukraine, including sending teams of British military medics conducting medical mentoring inside Ukraine, drawing on battlefield experience from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The cost of rebuilding war-battered Ukraine would amount to almost \$588 billion over the next decade, according to World Bank, the European Commission, the United Nations and the Ukrainian government.

That is nearly three times the estimated nominal GDP of Ukraine for last year, they said in a report Monday.

Iran says students must respect 'red lines' amid fresh anti-government protests



PARIS

Students have a right to protest but must "understand the red lines", Iran's government spokeswoman said on Tuesday, in the first official reaction to renewed anti-government rallies on campuses.

University students kicked off a new semester with gatherings over the weekend in which they revived slogans from nationwide protests against the country's clerical leadership that peaked in January and were met by a deadly crackdown.

On Monday, the third consecutive day of the campus protests, videos geolocated by AFP showed students at a university in Tehran burning the Iranian flag adopted by the Islamic republic after the 1979 revolution that toppled the monarchy.

"Sacred things and the flag are two examples of these red lines that we must protect and not cross or deviate from, even at the height of anger," government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said Tuesday.

She added that Iran's students "have wounds in their hearts and have seen scenes that may upset and anger them; this anger is under-

standable".

The initial wave of protests began in December, sparked by economic woes in the sanctions-hit country, but soon grew into nationwide demonstrations that crested on January 8 and 9, posing one of the largest challenges to Iran's leaders in years. The unrest prompted a violent government crackdown that killed thousands of people.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) has recorded more than 7,000 deaths while warning the full toll is likely far higher.

Iranian officials acknowledge more than 3,000 deaths, but say the violence was caused by "terrorist acts" fuelled by the United States and Israel. During the protests, the government had sought to walk a line between acknowledging protesters' legitimate economic grievances while condemning so-called "rioters." Mohajerani on Tuesday said a fact-finding mission is investigating "the causes and factors" of the protests and will provide reports.

The crackdown in January prompted US President Donald Trump to threaten to intervene militarily on the protest-

ers' behalf, though the focus of his threats soon shifted to Iran's contentious nuclear programme.

Since then, the US has carried out a massive military build-up in the Middle East aimed at pressuring Tehran into cutting a deal, even as the two sides pursue indirect negotiations, set to resume on Thursday in Geneva.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is for civilian use, but the West believes it is aimed at building an atomic bomb. Iran has vowed to retaliate "ferociously" against any attack from the United States, even a limited one, which Trump has publicly acknowledged he is considering.

Trump on Monday denied US media reports that the country's top military officer, General Dan Caine, had flagged the risks of a major operation against Iran — pointing to munitions shortages and the potential for lengthy entanglement, among others. "General Caine, like all of us, would like not to see War but, if a decision is made on going against Iran at a Military level, it is his opinion that it will be something easily won," Trump wrote on his Truth Social network.

North East Spring Festival 2026 to Celebrate Cultural Unity in Dimapur

Ministry of Culture
Government of India

North East

SPRING FESTIVAL

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Organised By

North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Dimapur
& South Central Zone Cultural Centre (SCZCC), Nagpur

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OUR CORRESPONDENT

Dimapur is all set to turn into a vibrant meeting ground of cultures as the North East Spring Festival 2026 takes shape from 26th to 28th February at the NEZCC Complex. The festival is being organised by the North East Zone Cultural Centre in collaboration with the South Central Zone Cultural Centre under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture.

This year's celebration carries a deeper meaning. It is not just about music or dance. It is about building a cultural bridge between regions. The festival will take place alongside the Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026, creating a shared space where traditions from the North East and South Central India meet, speak and connect.

A Festival with a Larger Purpose

The main goal is clear. To protect and promote the rich folk and tribal traditions of the North East. These traditions live in stories, songs, rhythms and rituals. Many of them survive through oral memory.

The festival offers artists a national stage. It also creates a



Your age doesn't define your maturity, your grades don't define your intelligence, and rumors don't define who you are.

space for exchange. Performers from different regions will share not only performances but also cultural practices.

Youth engagement is another focus. Folk, tribal, band and choir performances aim to attract young audiences. In doing so, the festival hopes to keep these traditions alive in changing times.

Dates and Venue
The North East Spring Festival 2026 will run from 26th to 28th February 2026 at the NEZCC Complex in Dimapur, Nagaland. Each evening's programmes will begin at 5 PM.

Folk and Tribal Voices of the North East
Cultural groups from all eight North Eastern states will take part. Each performance reflects identity, memory and heritage.

Arunachal Pradesh will present Rikhampada led by Shri Nabam Sonil with 12 artistes.

Assam will bring two performances: Bihu Nach led by Smt. Bishnupriya Gogoi with 15 artistes Daosri Delai led by Smt. Juri Boro with 13 artistes

Manipur will present Lai Haraoba, Thang-Ta and Cheirol Jagoi led by Shri Mutum Herojit Singh with 12 artistes.

Meghalaya will showcase Wangala led by Shri Jingjang A. Sangma with 12 artistes.

Mizoram will pres-

ent Cheraw through the Art and Culture Department with 15 artistes.

Nagaland will feature: Nzanta led by Smt. Ovungbeni Ovung with 12 artistes Tenem led by Guru Rarenbenba with 15 artistes

Sikkim will present Magar Nritya through the Culture Department with 12 artistes.

Tripura will bring Hojagiri led by Shri Debasish Reang with 12 artistes.

In total, 130 folk artistes from the North East will take part.

Music to Connect the Youth

To keep the younger crowd engaged, the festival includes band and choir performances.

Blue Temptation from Shillong will perform on 26 February. Coronation Choir from Dimapur will also perform on 26 February. 6 Strings from Assam will perform on 27 February. Brahmos from Kohima will perform on 27 February. The partnership with the Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026 gives this event a wider scope.

Special programmes under Bharat Ko Jano and the Border Area Programme are also

planned.

Extended festival events will be held beyond Dimapur: 26 to 28 February 2026 in Dimapur, Nagaland

2 to 3 March 2026 in Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh

5 to 6 March 2026 in Ri Bhoi, Meghalaya

Participation from South Central Zone Folk art forms from SCZCC states will be presented by 83 artistes.

These include: Badhai and Narta from Madhya Pradesh

Gondhal, Jagran and Jogwa from Maharashtra

Bathukamma and Bonalu from Telangana

Bessu kamsale from Karnataka

Devi Nritya from Karnataka

Panthi from Chhattisgarh

Folk Instrumental from Chhattisgarh

Dance and Music items include:

Badhai and Narta from Madhya Pradesh

Gondhal, Jagran and Jogwa from Maharashtra

Bathukamma and Bonalu from Telangana

Bessu kamsale from Karnataka

Devi Nritya from Karnataka

Chhattisgarh

Folk & Tribal Instrumental from Chhattisgarh

Expected Outcomes
The festival is expected to deepen cultural dialogue between regions. It will bring traditional art forms into wider public view.

It may also inspire more youth to learn and perform these traditions.

Another likely outcome is growth in cultural tourism in Nagaland and across the North East.

A Living Celebration of Diversity

The North East Spring Festival 2026, along with the Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026, promises to be a celebration of India's diversity.

The three day gathering in Dimapur will serve as a shared stage for folk artists, tribal performers, musicians and cultural lovers.

The initiative is being led by Dr Prashanna Gogoi, Director of NEZCC, Dimapur and Smt Astha M Karlekar, Director of SCZCC, Nagpur.

Through such efforts, the cultural story of India continues to grow, carried forward by the voices of its many communities.

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