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**PERSPECTIVE**  
The day a blind man sees, the first thing he throws away is the stick that has helped him all his life.  
— African Proverb

**Meghalaya Kicks Off Census 2027 as Governor Completes First Self-Enumeration**

**SHILLONG**  
Meghalaya Governor C.H. Vijayashankar on Friday launched the online registration portal for the Census of India 2027, marking the beginning of the census process in the state.  
Meghalaya Kicks Off Census 2027 as Governor Completes First Self-Enumeration  
Meghalaya Governor C.H. Vijayashankar launches the Census 2027 online self-enumeration portal at Lok Bhavan, Shillong, becoming the first individual in the state to register under Phase One of the census exercise. The Governor inaugurated the portal at Lok Bhavan in Shillong and became the first individual in Meghalaya to complete the self-enumeration process under Phase One by registering himself and his family on the platform. He was assisted by officials from the Directorate of Census Operations, Meghalaya, during the process. The launch programme was attended by Director of Census Operations, Meghalaya, Biswajit Pegu, East Khasi Hills Deputy Commissioner RM Kurba, and other senior officials.  
Officials stated that the census exercise formally began on May 1, with enumerators set to conduct house-to-house data collection using mobile applications. Authorities added that information submitted through the self-enumeration portal will be verified by enumerators during field visits as part of the census process. The digital platform is expected to streamline the data collection process and improve accuracy in the upcoming national census exercise.

**WHO SAID WHAT**

**Ladakh has shown the monks world wide path of Moksha.**  
~ Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

**Supreme Court orders fresh forensic analysis of audio clip allegedly linking N. Biren Singh to Manipur violence**

**NEW DELHI**  
The Supreme Court of India on Wednesday directed a fresh forensic examination of an audio recording allegedly linking former Manipur chief minister N. Biren Singh to the 2023 ethnic violence in the state, instructing the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) to

**“The said pen drive, being the first copy of the original, shall be furnished to the other side, to be forwarded to the NFSU for comparison with the admitted voice recordings of the individual concerned,”**



analyse the clip and conduct voice comparison.  
A Bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kumar and K. Vinod Chandran issued the directive while hearing a petition filed by the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), which has sought an independent Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe into the violence.  
The court ordered that a pen drive

**NIA arrests key accused in 2023 SDPO killing; protests, shutdown grip Moreh**

**IMPHAL**  
The arrest of a prime accused by the National Investigation Agency in connection with the 2023 killing of Sub-Divisional Police Officer Chingtham Anandakumar Singh has triggered fresh tensions in Moreh, with protests erupting and an emergency shutdown enforced in parts of Tengenoual district.  
In a statement, the NIA identified the accused as Otkhothang Baite, also known as Othang Baite, a resident of Moreh. He is alleged to have been part of a conspiracy linked to an attack by suspected Kuki militants on a district police team at a playground on October 31, 2023, during the peak of ethnic violence



in Manipur.  
According to the agency, SDPO Chingtham Anandakumar Singh sustained a fatal gunshot wound to

the abdomen during the attack. The case, initially registered by Moreh Police, was taken over by the NIA in March 2024. Investigators have described the conspiracy as an attempt to spread terror in the region.  
The agency also noted that another accused, Kamginthang Gangte, had been arrested earlier this month in connection with the same case. Probe in the matter, registered as RC-02/2024/NIA/IMP, is ongoing.  
The arrest, however, sparked immediate backlash on the ground. The Kuki Women Union & Human Rights (KWU&HR), Moreh Block, called for an emergency shutdown beginning around mid-after-

noon, bringing normal life in the border town to a halt.  
Protests intensified as large groups of women gathered and marched to the Moreh Police Station, demanding the immediate release of Baite, whom they described as a “village volunteer.”  
Demonstrators later moved towards the Tengenoual district administration offices, further escalating tensions.  
Sources said the situation remained volatile through the evening, with local organisations condemning the arrest as unjust and calling for his release. Security forces have been placed on alert amid fears of further unrest in the sensitive border region.

**Bailey bridge collapse on NH-102B snaps key lifeline to hill districts in Manipur**



**IMPHAL**  
A Bailey bridge over the Tuivai River along National Highway-102B has collapsed, severely disrupting supply lines to Churachandpur and other hill districts in Manipur, officials said on Friday. The bridge, located between Sinzawl and Khuangin villages on the Guite Road stretch, gave way late Thursday night when two cement-laden trucks were crossing it. According to the Guite Road Chiefs' Association (GRCA), the structure collapsed around 10:30 pm as the vehicles reached near the middle span.  
The affected route is a crucial supply corridor linking Churachandpur with Aizawl, facilitating the daily movement of essential commodities from Silchar and other parts of Assam via Mizoram. The disruption is expected to significantly impact supply chains and economic activity in the region's hill districts.  
Expressing concern, the GRCA has urged authorities, including the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited and the executing contractor, to restore the bridge on a “war footing.” Officials indicated that the scale of the damage and the river's width could affect restoration timelines. In response, the district administration has issued a traffic advisory and directed the NHIDCL to expedite repair and replacement work. Authorities confirmed that steps are already underway to procure and install a new Bailey bridge to restore connectivity at the earliest.  
Meanwhile, vehicular movement has been diverted through alternative routes, including the Sinzawl-Diakhal-Churachandpur stretch via NH-02. Commuters have been advised to adhere to official advisories and use designated bypass routes until normal traffic resumes.  
The district administration has assured the public that all necessary measures are being taken to restore the disrupted link, which remains a critical lifeline for the transportation of essential goods to the remote hill districts.

**CWC issues alert over rising river levels in Assam, Tripura amid forecast of continued rainfall**



**NEW DELHI**  
The Central Water Commission (CWC) has issued a flood alert for Assam and Tripura, warning of a potential rise in river levels across key basins amid forecasts of continued rainfall in the Northeast over the coming days.  
In its latest advisory, the CWC said water levels in several tributaries of the Brahmaputra River and Barak River are likely to increase significantly between May 1 and May 6, with some locations expected to cross normal flood levels.  
“Water level is expected to rise in tributaries of Brahmaputra and Barak, and at some locations it is expected to rise to above normal flood

situation during the same period,” the advisory noted, urging authorities to remain on high alert.  
Among the rivers flagged for concern is the Jibbarali River in Sonitpur district, which is expected to witness a notable rise. The main stem of the Brahmaputra is also likely to record elevated levels across multiple districts, including Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Goalpara, Sonitpur and Dhubri.  
In the Barak Valley, the CWC warned that water levels in Cachar and Karimganj districts could rise above normal flood levels. Rivers such as the Kushiya and Katakhal in Karimganj and Hailakandi districts have also been identified as vulnerable. For Tripura, the commission has advised close monitoring of several rivers, including Muhari, Burima, Gumti, Khowai, Manu, Haora and Juri, particularly through May 1.  
Officials noted that rising water levels in the Brahmaputra, Barak and their tributaries routinely trigger floods in Assam, where large swathes of land remain flood-prone. According to the state's Water Resources Department, Assam typically experiences three to four waves of flooding each year, with average annual losses estimated at around ₹200 crore.  
Last year, floods affected more than 6.3 lakh people across 21 districts in Assam, with multiple fatalities reported.  
Authorities have been advised to intensify monitoring and preparedness measures as the region braces for possible flood-like conditions in the coming days.

**Manipur govt launches official fact-check Facebook page to counter misinformation**

**IMPHAL**  
The Government of Manipur on Thursday launched an official fact-checking initiative on social media, introducing the “Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) Manipur Fact Check” Facebook page to verify government communications and curb the spread of misinformation.  
The page was inaugurated by Hungyo Worshang, Secretary (Information and Public Relations), who said the platform would serve as an authoritative source to authenticate government orders, notices, and circulars. He highlighted the growing threat posed by misinformation in the digital space and urged media organisations to support efforts aimed at countering rumours.  
Director (IPR) Th. Charanjeet Singh underscored the increasing need for fact-checking mechanisms, particularly in the era of artificial intelligence, where distinguishing between genuine and manipulated content has become more difficult.  
He cautioned that misleading information can create public confusion and potentially disrupt peace and development, especially in sensitive regions.  
Officials said nodal officers will be designated across government departments to verify documents before they are released in the public domain, in an effort to minimise the risk of misinformation and prevent possible unrest. The department has also invited inputs from stakeholders to strengthen the initiative.  
Alongside the launch, a one-day awareness programme was held in Imphal focusing on existing welfare schemes. The event included a media sensitisation session highlighting benefits available to journalists, such as pension schemes, welfare measures, and press accreditation facilities.

**No Lessons on Democracy: Himanta Biswa Sarma Counters Singhvi in Escalating Khera Row**



**GUWAHATI**  
The political standoff between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress sharpened on Friday, with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma issuing a pointed rebuttal to senior Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi over the controversy surrounding party spokesperson Pawan Khera.  
“I don't need lessons on democracy, public discourse or decency,” Sarma said in a strongly worded response, intensifying the war of words between the two sides amid ongoing legal and political developments in the case. The chief minister, in a post on X, accused Singhvi of sidestepping direct engagement on the issue and alleged that an apolitical woman had been unfairly dragged into the controversy. Sarma further claimed that her character was maligned on national television using what he described as “forged documents,” adding that he had faith in the judiciary to take cognisance of the matter and ensure accountability.  
The remarks came shortly after Singhvi called on the Assam chief minister to reassess his stance, referring to observations made by the Supreme Court of India during recent proceedings.  
Singhvi criticised certain public statements linked to the case as “highly inappropriate,” arguing that they risked eroding democratic norms and the quality of public discourse.  
Emphasising constitutional safeguards, Singhvi noted that most of the charges against Khera were bailable and underscored the importance of protecting dissent in a democracy. He cautioned that any attempt to curb free expression would undermine fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The exchange follows a significant legal development, with the Supreme Court granting anticipatory bail to Khera in connection with his alleged remarks concerning the chief minister's wife. A bench comprising Justices J.K. Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar extended the relief after previously reserving its verdict, subject to certain conditions. The episode has added to the growing friction between the ruling BJP in Assam and the Congress at the national level, with both sides invoking constitutional principles and judicial observations to bolster their positions. As the matter proceeds through the courts, the political rhetoric surrounding it shows little sign of abating.

**Storm fury in Tripura leaves two dead, thousands of homes damaged; power lines hit**

**AGARTALA**  
At least two persons, including a five-year-old child, lost their lives and four others were injured as severe storms battered parts of Tripura over the past 48 hours, officials said on Friday. The intense weather, marked by heavy rainfall and gusty winds, triggered widespread destruction across multiple districts, damaging homes, crops, and electricity infrastructure.  
According to State Project Director (Disaster Management) Sanat Kumar Das, a five-year-old child was killed while his sibling sustained injuries after their mud-walled house collapsed at Radhanagar in Unakoti district. In a separate incident, a man from Longtarai Valley in Dhalai district died after being struck by lightning a day earlier.  
Three additional people were injured in separate storm-related incidents across the state, officials said.  
Preliminary assessments indicate that as many as 3,997

houses suffered damage due to the storms, including 180 huts that were completely destroyed. The state government has released ₹79.59 lakh as interim relief to support affected families.  
Authorities had set up four relief camps to shelter displaced residents, accommodating around 243 families. With an improvement in weather conditions, officials said all occupants have since returned to their homes.  
The storms also severely impacted power infrastructure, with 129 electric poles reported to have collapsed, disrupting electricity supply in several areas. Restoration efforts are underway, particularly in remote and interior regions.  
Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places in Sepahjala and South Tripura districts on Friday, prompting authorities to maintain a high level of alert and preparedness.

containing the complete audio clip-stated to be over two hours in duration-be shared with all parties and forwarded to the NFSU for detailed forensic scrutiny. The Bench recorded submissions by advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner, that the 2-hour-36-minute recording had been copied from the original device onto a pen drive.  
“The said pen drive, being the first copy of the original, shall be furnished to the other side, to be forwarded to the NFSU for comparison with the admitted voice recordings of the individual concerned,” the court observed.  
The apex court directed the forensic body to determine whether the recording had been edited, altered, or tampered with, and to assess whether the voice in the clip matches the admitted samples of Singh.  
The order comes in continuation of earlier proceedings. On January 7, the court had called for forensic examination of a 48-minute audio clip and directed that all available recordings

be analysed, with findings to be submitted in a sealed cover. In December, the Bench had expressed concern over the submission of only selective portions of the recordings, noting it was “a little disturbed” by the omission.  
The NFSU had earlier indicated that certain leaked clips appeared to have been tampered with and were not suitable for scientific voice comparison. However, the petitioner's counsel referred to a separate forensic assessment suggesting that at least one of the recordings may be unedited.  
The case arises from the ethnic violence that broke out in Manipur in May 2023 between Meitei and Kuki communities, which has left over 260 people dead and displaced thousands. KOHUR has alleged the involvement of Singh in the unrest-claims that remain under judicial consideration.  
Singh had resigned from the post of chief minister on February 9 last year.  
The matter continues to be under hearing before the Supreme Court.



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## VOTING AS A RECLAIMING OF THE SELF

The imperative to vote—to make a decision and exercise the choice by registering it through pressing the button on the voting machine—has changed the dynamics of participation and politics in West Bengal. It may be too early to say whether the special intensive revision worked to threaten or secure the status quo at the party politics level; but the subsoil did go into a churn.

Approximately 31 lakh more people voted in this election than in the 2021 Assembly election. This increase in absolute numbers comes despite there being over 50 lakh fewer voters on the rolls this time—with the population increase offset by the 58 lakh names deleted as absent, shifted, deceased and duplicate, plus the 28 lakh effectively disenfranchised as adjudication on their status didn't happen in time. This is incontrovertible evidence that the people came forward to say they own their franchise, and to speak through it. The verdict, once it comes on May 4, will need to be understood within the context of this reclamation of voting rights in a situation of precarity.

West Bengal has historically registered high voter turnouts of over 80 percent in recent decades. But a turnout of about 93 percent across the two phases this year is a new record. The significant change in this election is a higher turnout in Kolkata and increased participation of women, outnumbering men. The percentage surges are clearly the SIR effect.

Voting, making political choices, was not a mechanical routine in this fraught air, not an obligation executed out of dead habit. That is the big change—the years of political disengagement are over. The forced disenfranchisement of 28 lakh voters for no fault of their own, the stigmatisation of the deleted as “ghuspaithiyas” or illegal non-citizens, created anger and panic in equal measure. Apathy, which had long overtaken popular engagement with politics, was not an option.

The forcible embedding of citizenship within electoral politics, as the SIR process has done, has prompted voters in West Bengal to reflect upon their identities, in terms of where they belong. This is much deeper than the BJP's capture of identity by religion. Its systematic campaign of dividing people over identities, classifying Bengalis as Hindu refugees and victims of Partition, and linking it to the narrative of an ‘illegal’ Muslim demographic swarm posing a threat to the Hindu majority, did find a receptive audience—it has added up to 38 percent of the voters since 2019. What about the rest?

“We had forgotten that our families had come over the border as refugees in 1947. Now, the third generation of settlers is talking about their refugee identity,” one such voter explained. The 2026 election marks the moment when this reconstructed identification as refugee is being interrogated by the subject on whose behalf that manoeuvre is done: precisely, such refugees.

The conflict between the Bengali as a tolerant, inclusive Hindu and an orthodox, intolerant, fixated-on-purity-and-ritual Hindu that was a popular genre of literature at the turn of the 20th century has resurfaced. A Hindutva spun elsewhere has nudged Bengalis into reconsidering who they want to be and how they ought to allow themselves to be represented.

Bengali identity, here, is not just about cultural or linguistic pride or how Bengali political consciousness shaped and catered to nationalist thought and the freedom movement. It is certainly not just about preference for fish. This election, with its absurd campaign over food consumption, has actually prompted Bengalis to think about who they are beyond the clichés they constructed to amuse themselves and others.

The reflection has produced a distinctive political consciousness, of participating in a just cause. The biggest change is the reawakening of Bengali bhadralok consciousness. Over the years, older people have acquiesced in or lamented over the growing indifference of the population to what happens to others. Casting a vote this time was not merely self-interest, but about the collective anger that neighbours, acquaintances, friends and family had been stripped of their rights. How long this change will last is unpredictable. But it is a rekindling of self-worth.

The SIR has touched the political consciousness at a profound level, and compelled Bengalis to rethink the relationship with political actors as well as the Indian State. A reclamation of the self, a principled veto, a gesture of survival, an approval of deportation politics—the high turnout is all of these at once.

The long queues at the polling booths in the three other states that voted post SIR also underscore the perception that people need to reconfirm their status as citizens and eligible voters. There is an imperative at work in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam, too, that staying aloof is not an option. The risk of being disempowered through disenfranchisement is at work in all these places.

Whether Bengal chooses to define survival as merely the work of a selfish gene or in terms of a cultural-political democratic self worth preserving will be known soon. Either way, it will feed into how voters engage with the politics that follows until 2029.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none. -

William Shakespeare

# CAMPUS AS A CRUCIBLE: REIMAGINING STUDENT POLITICS



SHASHI THAROOR

The recent discourse surrounding the Kerala High Court's stance on campus politics (the court favoured a “congenial atmosphere” free from “political influence”) touches a raw nerve in the Indian educational landscape. It presents us with a false dichotomy: we are told we must choose either the sterile, apolitical silence of a “purely academic” institution or the chaotic, often violent mirror of state-level partisan warfare.

This choice is not only reductive; it is dangerous for the future of Indian democracy. To suggest that universities should be sanitised of political activism is to ignore their fundamental role as a laboratory for citizenship. However, the critics of campus politics are not entirely wrong; the infiltration of mainstream political parties into student life has often replaced intellectual debate with muscle power. The way forward lies not in banning politics, but in decoupling student activism from external party machinery.

A university is more than a degree factory; it is the first space where a young person interacts with the state and society as an independent adult. If we treat students as passive recipients of knowledge until the day they graduate, we cannot expect them to suddenly emerge as informed, critical and engaged citizens.

Both my sons were outstanding students at Yale University, but one of them, Ishaan, won a special award when he graduated for being “the senior who did the most to rouse the conscience of the college”. He had founded a ‘progressive’ student magazine, and had also led an agitation to get better wages and employment conditions for the dining-hall workers. That experience taught him more about democracy than a dozen academic seminars might have.

Political discussion, engagement and activism are essential pedagogical tools. They teach students how to negotiate differences, how to organise for a cause, and how to hold authority accountable. When a student group protests a fee hike or debates a national policy, they are practising the very mechanics of a healthy democracy. By barring these activities, we are effectively telling the next generation that ‘politics’ is a dirty business best left to professionals, rather than a civic duty shared by all.

The real rot in Indian campus life is not the presence of politics, but the presence of party-political proxies. Organisations like the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and Students' Federation of India (SFI) are the youth wings of national or regional parties rather than organic campus movements. This dependency creates several systemic issues. The worst is external interference: when a student election is funded and directed by a national party, the issues debated are rarely about the campus library or hostel conditions. Instead, they become microcosms of national polarisations.

In Kerala, mainstream political rivalry often brings with it a culture of intimidation. The tension and lawlessness mentioned in various court rulings often stem from the fact that student leaders see themselves as foot soldiers for

external bosses rather than representatives of their peers. Party discipline also inevitably discourages independent thought. Students are pressured to adopt the ‘party line’ on every issue, which is the antithesis of the critical thinking a university is supposed to foster. The stifling of nuance is contrary to the pedagogical ethos that should animate a university.

If we accept that political engagement is necessary but party-political interference is toxic, we must look for a middle path. The goal should be to foster autonomous student governance. We should move toward a model where student unions are strictly independent of registered political parties. This is not a radical idea. I was elected president of the St Stephen's College student union in 1974 in an election blissfully free of organised political parties. Many of the world's leading universities operate under ‘independent student unions’ where candidates run on individual platforms or campus-specific coalitions.

To be sure, any argument for keeping national parties off campus must acknowledge the real advantages they offer. For many first-generation or rural students, organisations like the NSUI, ABVP or SFI provide the cash, mentorship and networks that make political participation possible. Their national reach also gives student unions leverage when confronting an unresponsive university administration or state government. And exposure to national-level mobilisation and party discipline is part of learning how real-world politics works.

Yet, none of this requires the formal presence of external party organisations inside the university. Funding, training and mentorship can be institutionalised through need-based student development programmes; student unions can be empowered through statutory protections rather than partisan patronage and the skills of negotiation, consensus-building, and disciplined collective action can be cultivated within autonomous campus bodies. In other words, the benefits that national parties currently provide can be secured through healthier, more transpar-

ent mechanisms—without turning universities into extensions of national political battlegrounds.

To bridge the gap between academic discipline and democratic vigour, we need a three-pronged reform. The first element is financial and organisational decoupling. Strict regulations should be placed on election spending with a mandate that all funds must be raised internally or provided by the university. Any evidence of funding from a registered political party should lead to immediate disqualification.

Second, university administrations and student bodies should work together to ensure that union charters focus on campus-specific governance—academic quality, student welfare and local social justice. By shifting focus to the immediate community, the incentive for external parties to intervene diminishes. And third, rather than shutting down political debate, universities should institutionalise it. Instead of chaotic rallies, campuses should host structured debates, town halls and ‘civic forums’. These should be spaces where students can debate national issues—yes, even controversial ones—without the fear of being branded by a party label or facing physical retribution.

The Kerala High Court and the Lyngdoh Committee are right to be concerned about the academic atmosphere prevailing above the political. But their solution—leaving everything to the discretion of educational institutions—can lead to a paternalistic environment where any dissent is labelled ‘indiscipline’. The judiciary should not aim to silence the campus; it should aim to protect the campus from the street. The doctrine should be one of institutional neutrality: The institution itself remains neutral, but it provides a protected, safe space for its students to be un-neutral, to be passionate and to be political.

The purpose of a university is, at bottom, tutelary. But learning to be a citizen is just as important as learning to be an engineer or a historian. If we ban political activism, we create a generation of apathetic technocrats. If we allow party politics to run rampant, we create

a generation of polarised partisans. By choosing a path of independent student activism, we can create a generation of thinkers who understand that while they may or may not belong to a party, they certainly belong to a democracy. Let the campus be a place where ideas go to battle, so that the students don't have to.

Shashi Tharoor | Lok Sabha MP, Chair of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and Sahitya Akademi-winning author

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**The longer the Strait of Hormuz is choked, the higher the cost to humanity.**

**My message is clear: Open the Strait. Let all ships pass. Let the global economy breathe again.**

~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations



## Zubeen Garg Death Case: Court Denies Bail to Shyamkanu Mahanta, Flags Flight Risk and Conduct

GUWAHATI

In a key development in the high-profile death case of singer Zubeen Garg, a fast-track court on Thursday rejected the bail plea of accused Shyamkanu Mahanta, citing concerns over his conduct and the likelihood of evading the law.

The order was passed after hearing detailed submissions from both sides, with the prosecution strongly opposing any relief. Senior Advocate and Special Public Prosecutor Ziaul Kamar said the court has so far pronounced only the operative portion of the order, while a detailed judgment is awaited.

According to the prosecution, the court took serious note of Mahanta's actions following the al-



leged incident. It observed that instead of cooperating with legal processes, the accused moved from the place of occurrence-identified as Singapore-and later travelled to Malaysia.

"The court has considered this conduct seriously and viewed him as a flight risk. On that ground, bail has been rejected," Kamar told reporters.

The prosecution further alleged that Mahanta had supplied a liquor bottle to Garg at a hotel lobby, after which the singer reportedly became extremely drowsy and vulnerable. It was also argued that despite being aware of Garg's medical condition, including epilepsy, the accused allowed him to enter the water under circumstances where

it was not advisable.

In a parallel development, the court has permitted attachment of certain assets allegedly linked to the accused. Acting on petitions filed under Section 107 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, the court ordered attachment of Mahanta's partnership stake in a firm identified as Mahaveer Aqua.

Investigators claimed that the investment was made using funds allegedly misappropriated from Garg. The prosecution also secured orders for attachment of six bank accounts purportedly containing proceeds linked to the case.

Kamar alleged that some of these accounts were held in the names of the accused's immediate family members, including his younger

brother and mother, who allegedly had no independent sources of income. He added that the defence failed to produce income tax records or documentary evidence to establish the legitimacy of the funds.

On the status of proceedings, the prosecutor said the next hearing has been scheduled for May 2, when the accused-identified as A1 and A2-are expected to submit their written arguments during the charge stage. Following this, the court is likely to move toward framing of charges.

The case, which has drawn widespread public attention across Assam, is now entering a crucial phase as judicial scrutiny intensifies in the lead-up to the charge order.

### Nagaland begins statewide manuscript survey under Gyan Bharatam Mission

DIMAPUR

Nagaland's Art and Culture Department has launched a statewide manuscript survey under the Gyan Bharatam Mission, a national initiative of the Union Ministry of Culture, officials said.

The mission aims to identify, document and create a national database of manuscripts and historically significant records, with a focus on preserving India's documentary heritage and traditional knowledge systems.

Officials said a large number of valuable manuscripts and records remain scattered across institutions, religious centres, community repositories and private collections, many of which are yet to be documented.

In Nagaland, such documentary heritage is largely preserved outside formal archival systems and is often found in church archives, missionary records, village institutions, early translations, customary records and private family collections.

The ongoing exercise seeks to systematically identify these materials and upload their details on a national digital platform, they said.

The department has appealed to institutions, organisations and individuals to share information about manuscripts or old records in their possession.

It clarified that the survey is limited to documentation and does not involve removal or transfer of materials from their custodians.

Officials said public participation would be crucial for the successful implementation of the mission and for ensuring that Nagaland's documentary heritage is properly identified, recorded and preserved.

### Exit polls unreliable, Congress monitoring strong rooms closely in Assam: MP Rakibul Hussain

DHUBRI

Congress MP Rakibul Hussain dismissed the credibility of exit polls and said the Congress-led alliance is confident of forming the next government in Assam after the results are declared on May 4. Addressing a press conference at his residence in Dhubri, Hussain said representatives of the party, including MPs and MLAs, visited a strong room at Gauripur PC Institute Model Higher Secondary School where Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) from five Assembly constituencies of the district are currently stored under security. He alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is attempting to shape public perception through exit poll projections, expressing dissatisfaction over the figures being circulated.

Raising concerns over the electoral process, Hussain pointed to alleged discrepancies in Form 17C and urged the Election Commission

of India to ensure transparency and accuracy during the counting of votes. Referring to previous election forecasts, he said that in 2021, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had predicted a tally of 100 seats for the BJP, while the party ultimately secured around 60 seats. "This time they are projecting 80 seats, which suggests they may end up with only around 40," Hussain said.

The Congress leader also claimed that "silent voters" and first-time voters would play a decisive role in the outcome. He added that reports of young voters chanting "Joy Zubeen Da" after casting their ballots reflect a shift in public sentiment.

Hussain asserted that the Congress and its alliance partners are poised to form the government, alleging that leaders within the BJP have begun discussing internal issues and "betrayal" amid apprehensions of defeat.

### Tripura Minister's 'Expose Opponents' Remark on Women's Bill Sparks Political Row

AGARTALA

A political controversy erupted in Tripura on Thursday after Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ratan Lal Nath urged women to identify and "expose" those opposing the proposed 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill, while launching a sharp attack on opposition parties during a special sitting of the Assembly.

The remarks came during a one-day session of the Tripura Legislative Assembly convened to deliberate on the proposed Nari Shakti Bandhan Adhiniyam, which seeks to strengthen constitutional rights, political participation, and empowerment of women.

Addressing the House, Nath described the issue as more than a legislative exercise, calling it a "historic responsibility" tied to the future of Indian democracy. He said the Assembly had moved a motion to convey its support for the proposed legislation and to signal its importance to political



stakeholders.

"We are talking about the reintroduction of the bill... This discussion is to strengthen and secure the constitutional and political rights of women," Nath said.

Emphasising gender parity in governance, the minister questioned whether political institutions were ensuring equal participation for women despite constitutional guarantees. He urged opposition parties to support the bill, asserting that its adoption would have far-reaching consequences.

In a pointed political attack,

Nath criticised both the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Indian National Congress, claiming they would continue to lose relevance despite efforts to rebuild their public image.

Referring to the Women's Reservation Act 2023, the minister said legislative passage alone was insufficient without timely implementation. He argued that the proposed 131st Amendment Bill was necessary to translate the intent of earlier reforms into action.

"The dream which the entire country is watching, we must fulfil it... Making a law alone cannot

help; we have to implement it as soon as possible," he said.

Alleging that several opposition parties had resisted the move, Nath called on them to study the provisions of the bill before criticising it.

His most contentious remark came when he appealed to women voters to publicly identify and expose those opposing the amendment. "Those who are opposing the 131st Amendment Bill should be identified and their real mask should be exposed before the people," he said.

He further claimed that opposition parties were losing electoral ground due to their stance on women-centric reforms, asserting that their political decline would continue.

The comments are expected to sharpen political tensions in the state, where debates over women's reservation, constitutional amendments, and electoral representation are emerging as key issues ahead of upcoming elections.

### Dimapur Tops HIV Positivity in Nagaland

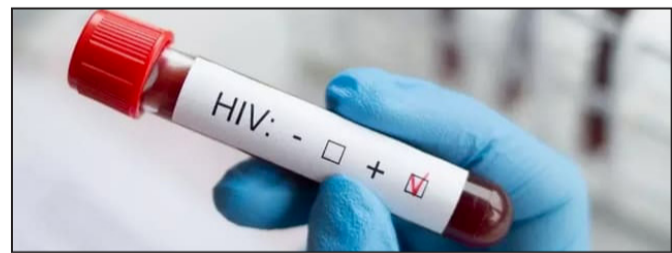
DIMAPUR

Dimapur has recorded the highest HIV positivity rate in Nagaland for 2025-26, even as Noklak reported the steepest decline over the past four years, according to the latest estimates released by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO).

As per NACO's HIV Estimation 2025 data covering the period from 2022-23 to 2025-26, Dimapur registered an HIV positivity rate of 1.30% in 2025-26, the highest among all districts in the state. However, the district has shown a consistent decline from 2.26% in 2022-23 to 1.67% in 2023-24 and 1.57% in 2024-25.

Nagaland continues to be the second-highest HIV burden state in India after Mizoram. The state's adult HIV prevalence stands at 1.37%, significantly higher than the national average of 0.2%, while Mizoram recorded the highest prevalence at 2.75%.

Among districts, Noklak showed the most significant improvement, with HIV positivity dropping sharply from 5.53% in 2022-23 to the highest



recorded in the state during the period-to 1.47% in 2023-24, 1.17% in 2024-25 and 0.87% in 2025-26.

Overall, Nagaland's HIV positivity rate has declined steadily, from 1.36% in 2022-23 to 1.13% in 2023-24, 1.02% in 2024-25 and 0.86% in 2025-26, reflecting gradual progress in control measures.

Apart from Dimapur, districts reporting relatively higher positivity rates in 2025-26 include Peren (0.96%), Kohima (0.94%), Noklak (0.87%) and Wokha (0.86%).

Kohima recorded gradual improvement, declining from 1.21% in 2022-23 to 0.94% in 2025-26, while Tuensang saw a drop from 1.47% to

0.71% during the same period.

Further improvements were observed in Kiphire, where the rate fell from 0.78% to 0.56%, and Mon, which improved from 0.51% to 0.31%. Phek remained stable at 0.74% for three consecutive years before declining sharply to 0.30% in 2025-26.

However, some districts recorded an increase. Wokha rose from 0.58% in 2024-25 to 0.86% in 2025-26, while Zunheboto increased from 0.31% to 0.54%.

Longleng recorded the lowest HIV positivity rate in the state at 0.13% in 2025-26.

Trend estimates indicate that

Nagaland's adult HIV prevalence among the 15-49 age group has remained above 1.3% for over a decade, in contrast to India's steady decline from 0.32% in 2010 to 0.2% in 2025.

Age-wise data for April 2025 to March 2026 shows that the 25-34 age group was the most affected, accounting for 38.47% of cases, followed by those aged 35-49 years (33.47%). The 15-24 age group accounted for 15.32%, children below 14 years 4.39%, and those aged 50 and above 8.35%.

In terms of transmission, heterosexual contact remained the leading mode at 83.08%, followed by needle and syringe sharing (10.99%), parent-to-child transmission (4.64%), homo/bisexual transmission (0.88%), blood-related transmission (0.05%) and unknown causes (0.36%).

Despite improvements in several districts, the data underscores the need for sustained awareness campaigns, targeted interventions, expanded testing, and improved access to treatment and counselling services across the state.

### Meghalaya Honeymoon Murder Case: Indore Family Disowns Sonam After Bail, Says She Cannot Return Home

SHILLONG/INDORE

In a dramatic turn in the sensational murder case of Raja Raghuvanshi, the family of accused Sonam Raghuvanshi has publicly disowned her following her release on bail by a court in the Northeast.

Sonam, who is currently lodged in jail in Meghalaya, is expected to walk free within the next two days after completion of legal formalities.

Her elder brother, Govind Raghuvanshi, speaking from Indore, said the family had neither engaged legal counsel on her behalf nor had any prior knowledge of her bail application.

"I had no knowledge of Sonam's bail plea. I learned the news from the media. I have not appointed a lawyer to assist my sister," he said, adding that another sister had travelled to Shillong to complete the release formalities. In a strong statement distancing the family from the accused, Govind made it clear that Sonam would not be allowed to return to the family home after her release. "We have left Sonam to her own fate. Our family is clear that it would not keep Sonam at our home here," he said.

The development comes amid escalating tensions between the families of the accused and the deceased. Vipin Raghuvanshi, brother of the victim, has reportedly expressed fear for his life and the safety of his family, while accusing Sonam's relatives of betrayal.

Responding to those allegations, Govind said he was "speechless" over the remarks.

The case had earlier exposed deep fissures within Sonam's own family. Following her arrest in

June 2025, Govind had visited the victim's residence and publicly demanded strict punishment for his sister, stating that the family had severed ties with her.

Sonam was arrested on June 9, 2025, from Ghazipur on charges of conspiring to murder her husband during their honeymoon trip to Meghalaya. Investigators have alleged that the killing was premeditated, triggering widespread public outrage across the country.

Her release on bail is expected to further intensify public scrutiny as the case proceeds toward trial.

MJ Akbar Flags Shifting Global Power Balance at Gauhati University Symposium

Guwahati, April 30: Former Minister of State for External Affairs M. J. Akbar on Thursday said the global order is undergoing a profound transformation, with established international institutions facing mounting challenges in an increasingly multipolar world.

Akbar was delivering the keynote address at a national symposium on "West Asia in a Fragmented Global Order: Security Dynamics and Economic Implications," organised by Gauhati University. The event was attended by Vice Chancellor Nani Gopal Mahanta, along with scholars, policy experts and invited guests.

Highlighting recent geopolitical and economic developments, Akbar said traditional centres of influence are gradually weakening. Referring to shifts in global energy alignments, he noted that the United Arab Emirates distancing itself from OPEC reflects a broader reconfiguration of power in global oil markets.

### RGU Organises Mega Blood Donation Drive with GMCH, Collects 92 Units



GUWAHATI

The Assam Royal Global University hosted a mega blood donation drive on Thursday in collaboration with the State-of-the-Art Model Blood Center of Gauhati Medical College and Hospital. The event was organised by the university's NSS Cell at its

campus. The drive saw wide participation from students, faculty, and staff. Members from nearby institutions, including Royal Global School, also joined. More than 150 people registered, and 92 units of

blood were collected during the day-long programme. Pankaj Kaul attended the event and encouraged young people to donate blood regularly. He shared that he has donated blood 119 times and said fear should not stop anyone from helping save lives. The medical process was supervised by Dipankar Baruah, who ensured all safety steps were followed. He said India needs to increase its blood donor base from 1 percent to 2 percent of the population to meet demand.

Victor Narzary praised the student volunteers for their active role. He said the response showed strong youth involvement in community service.

Many student donors said the



experience was meaningful. One donor said it felt empowering to help someone in need through a simple act.

The organisers said the drive is part of a larger effort to promote voluntary blood donation and build long-term partnerships with healthcare institutions. The programme ended with thanks to the GMCH team and all participants.

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## Vietnam President To Lam to visit India from May 5-7



NEW DELHI

Vietnamese President To Lam will undertake a three-day visit to India from May 5 to 7, aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation in defence, trade and critical technologies amid rising geopolitical uncertainties and global trade disruptions.

To Lam, who also serves as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, will lead a high-level delegation of ministers and top executives during his state visit next week. This will be his first state visit to India since assuming the presidency earlier this month.

During the visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Lam are scheduled to hold wide-range of talks focusing on advancing the India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with particular emphasis on trade, defence cooperation and critical technologies.

Announcing his visit, External Affairs Ministry said the Vietnamese leader will receive a ceremonial

welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan on May 6.

"Prime Minister Modi will hold wide-ranging discussions with President To Lam across the spectrum of bilateral relations as also on regional and global issues of mutual interest," the MEA said in a statement. The two leaders are also expected to discuss regional security developments, including the situations in West Asia and the South China Sea, where tensions have risen due to increased Chinese military activity and competing territorial claims.

The South China Sea remains a focal point of regional tension, where China's expansive territorial claims over the resource-rich waters face persistent challenges from nations including Vietnam, the Philippines, and Brunei. In response, India has joined the international community in advocating for a peaceful resolution to these disputes, emphasizing adherence to international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

A central pillar of the bilateral relationship is the deepening of maritime defense cooperation. Building on momentum from the previous year—which saw the signing of an agreement on submarine search and rescue and a letter of intent to bolster defense industry collaboration—maritime security is expected to dominate upcoming discussions. These strategic dialogues will involve high-level engagements, as President Droupadi Murmu and other Indian leaders are scheduled to meet with President Lam during his official visit.

The timing of this visit is particularly significant, marking the 10th anniversary of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership established during Prime Minister Modi's 2016 visit to Vietnam. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, this high-level engagement is designed to inject fresh momentum into an already robust bilateral relationship, aimed at uncovering new avenues for cooperation between the two nations.

## High drama in Kolkata as TMC stages sit-in outside strongroom; Mamata visits Bhabanipur, alleges EVM tampering

### 'NO CCTV TURNED OFF, ALL PARTIES INFORMED': EC DISMISSES TMC'S EVM TAMPERING CLAIMS

KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo and chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday visited the counting centre for the Bhabanipur Assembly segment at Sakhawat Memorial School in Kolkata, raising concerns over alleged tampering of electronic voting machines (EVMs).

Despite heavy rain in the city, Banerjee arrived at the premises in the evening and remained inside the strong room area along with her election agent.

Kolkata Mayor and TMC candidate for the Kolkata Port segment, Firhad Hakim, also reached the venue.

"I reached here upon learning that the chief minister has arrived. But I couldn't meet her since she was already inside the premises, exercising her right as a candidate to visit strong rooms. I wasn't allowed there. I will not be able to confirm what exactly is transpiring inside," Hakim said.

Meanwhile, tensions were reported in north Kolkata where TMC candidates Kunal Ghosh and Shashi Panja staged a sit-in protest outside the Khudiram Anushilan Kendra, alleging irregularities in the storage of EVMs.

The protest followed allegations that party workers stationed near the strongroom were asked to leave earlier in the day and were subsequently informed via email that the facility would be reopened at 4 p.m.

TMC candidates Kunal Ghosh, second left, and Shashi Panja, centre, and others stage a sit-in protest outside a strong room at Khudiram Anushilan Kendra, ahead of the counting of votes for the West Bengal Assembly elections, in Kolkata, Thursday, April 30, 2026.



Speaking on the incident, Ghosh said, "Party workers and supporters were present outside the strongroom till 3.30 pm. Suddenly, an email was sent informing that the strongroom would be opened again at 4 pm. We contacted our workers, and they said they had left. We then rushed here. Now we are not being allowed to enter. BJP is being invited."

He further said discrepancies, citing visuals purportedly showing activity inside the premises. "Ballot papers are being moved inside. Yet the CEO is saying nothing is happening. If postal ballots are being processed, where did they come from? If an email was sent, why were we not informed?" he said.

Panja questioned the lack of communication, stating, "The strongroom is extremely sensitive. If it is opened, all political parties must be informed. Why was no one informed?"

Earlier in the day, Banerjee, in a video message, urged party leaders and workers to remain alert. "You must guard the counting centres. If needed, I will also go and

guard my area. Candidates must guard themselves. Stay awake. If I can do it, so can you. There is a plan to change the machines while transporting EVMs. Do not take this lightly," she said.

In a post on X, the Trinamool Congress accused the Election Commission of India of colluding with the Bharatiya Janata Party, alleging that CCTV footage showed ballot boxes being opened without authorised representatives present. The party termed it "murder of democracy in broad daylight" and "gross electoral fraud". Amid protests by TMC leaders over alleged tampering in the West Bengal Assembly elections, State Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal clarified that "no CCTV cameras were switched off in the strong rooms." He also added that live footage of the rooms was made available to all parties.

He said that live footage from all eight strong rooms, including seven housing EVMs and one for postal ballots, was being continuously telecast, and representatives of political parties were allowed

to monitor it from beyond the three-layer security.

Addressing concerns about activity seen around 4 pm, Agarwal explained that officials had opened the postal ballot strong room as per rules, with prior intimation given to all candidates and parties by the Returning Officer. "As per the rules, all political parties and candidates were informed by the RO (Returning Officer)," he said.

"They should have come there. After 4 pm, three candidates arrived and saw that the EVM strong rooms were sealed while the postal ballot strong room was open. The three then left," the electoral officer said.

He also asserted that there would be "no law and order situation," adding that "these things happen." The officer further noted that the counting of votes would be conducted in a "100% neat and clean" manner. In a press briefing late on Thursday, the West Bengal CEO said that the ECI is "fully prepared for vote counting and all procedures will be followed strictly." The statement comes after TMC leaders claimed that the BJP, in the presence of EC officials, attempted to open ballot boxes in the absence of relevant party representatives. TMC leaders Shashi Panja and Kunal Ghosh also staged a dharna in front of the strong room outside Netaji Indoor Stadium in Kolkata.

To support their claims, the TMC also shared CCTV footage that it alleged was from inside a strong room in the Bengal capital. In a social media post, the party claimed that the footage exposed how the BJP, in collusion with the Election Commission, opened ballot boxes without the presence of relevant stakeholders.

## INTERNATIONAL

## Myanmar reduces ousted leader Suu Kyi's prison term in new amnesty



BANGKOK

Myanmar's military-backed government shortened the prison sentence of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Thursday, a move that came as part of a prisoner pardon tied to a Buddhist religious holiday, according to legal officials and reports in state media.

The amnesty is the second in two weeks, following an earlier one on April 17 when more than 4,500 prisoners were granted amnesty. It was not immediately clear how many people imprisoned for opposing military

rule in Myanmar were included in Thursday's amnesty.

Two legal officials, who insisted on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities, said Thursday's measure would further reduce Suu Kyi's sentence by one-sixth, but did not specify the exact remaining term. Based on previous reductions, the 80-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate is expected to have more than 13 years left to serve.

State media said Thursday that in addition to the amnesty granted to 1,519 prisoners, including 11 foreigners, the

sentences of remaining convicted prisoners were cut by one-sixth to mark the Full Moon day of "Kason," known as Buddha's Birthday and Demise.

The amnesties come after Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was sworn into office as president on April 10 following an election that critics say was neither free nor fair and was orchestrated to maintain the military's tight grip on power.

In his inauguration speech, he said his government would grant amnesties aimed at promoting social reconciliation, justice and peace.

Suu Kyi was arrested on Feb. 1, 2021 when the army seized power from her elected government.

She was originally sentenced to 33 years in prison in late 2022 for several offenses that her supporters and rights groups described as attempts to discredit her and legitimize the army takeover that removed her from office, as well as to prevent her return to politics.

Her term was reduced to 27 years in August 2023 and then further cut by more than four years on April 17, when prison terms of less than 40 years were cut by one-sixth.

Suu Kyi is serving the prison term at an undisclosed location in the capital Naypyitaw.

There were reports last week that she might be transferred to house arrest as part of the clemency, but there was no confirmation from the government.

Information about her condition remains tightly controlled. Reports in 2024 and 2025 indicated declining health, including low blood pressure, dizziness and heart problems, but these claims could not be independently verified. Her legal team has not been allowed to meet her in person since December 2022.

The 2021 army takeover triggered massive public resistance that was brutally suppressed, triggering a bloody civil war that has killed thousands of people.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a rights monitoring organization, 22,047 people have been in detention in Myanmar since the army takeover.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of Myanmar's martyred independence hero Gen. Aung San, spent almost 15 years as a political prisoner under house arrest between 1989 and 2010.

## 'Americans belong at bottom of Gulf waters': Iran's Khamenei vows to protect 'nuclear, missile capabilities'



DUBAI

Iran's supreme leader said Thursday that the Islamic Republic will protect its "nuclear and missile capabilities" as a national asset, likely seeking to draw a hard line as US President Donald Trump seeks a wider deal to cement the shaky ceasefire now holding in the war.

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, speaking in a written statement read by a state television anchor as he has since taking over as Iran's supreme leader, struck a defiant tone, insisting the only place Americans belonged in the Persian Gulf is "at the bottom of its waters."

However, his remarks come as Iran's oil industry has begun to be squeezed by a US Navy blockade halting its oil tankers from getting out to sea. Meanwhile, benchmark Brent crude for June delivery reached as much as \$126 a barrel in trading on Thursday as Iran maintains its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all crude oil and natural gas traded passes.

"By God's help and power, the bright future of the Persian Gulf region will be a future

without America, one serving the progress, comfort and prosperity of its people," Khamenei said in the statement, read like all others since he reportedly was wounded in the Feb. 28 attack that killed his father, the 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"We and our neighbors across the waters of the Persian Gulf and the (Gulf) of Oman share a common destiny. Foreigners who come from thousands of kilometers away to act with greed and malice there have no place in it—except at the bottom of its waters."

Meanwhile, in a cryptic post on X, Khamenei said, "A new chapter for the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is unfolding."

He added, "Today, it has been proven to not only the global public opinion but even to the rulers of countries that the US's presence and establishment in the Persian Gulf is the main source of instability in the region." With a fragile ceasefire in place, the US and Iran are locked in a standoff over the strait. The US blockade is designed to prevent Iran from selling its oil, depriving it of crucial revenue while also potentially creating a situation where Tehran has to shut off production because it has

nowhere to store oil.

The strait's closure, meanwhile, has put pressure on Trump, as oil and gasoline prices have skyrocketed ahead of crucial midterm elections, and it has pressured his Gulf allies, which use the waterway to export their oil and gas.

A recent Iranian proposal would push negotiations on the country's nuclear program to a later date. Trump said one of the major reasons he went to war was to deny Iran the ability to develop nuclear weapons. Iran long has maintained its program is peaceful, though it enriched uranium at near-weapons-grade levels of 60%.

Speaking to mark Persian Gulf Day in Iran, Khamenei's remarks signaled that nuclear issues and Iran's ballistic missile program wouldn't be traded away.

"Ninety million proud and honorable Iranians inside and outside the country regard all of Iran's identity-based, spiritual, human, scientific, industrial and technological capacities—from nanotechnology and biotechnology to nuclear and missile capabilities—as national assets, and will protect them just as they protect the country's waters, land and airspace," Khamenei said.

## Ahead of the Curve: Manipur University Achieves 80% ABC, 70% FYUP Implementation

In the evolving landscape of higher education reform in India, Manipur University has emerged as a rare early mover in translating the vision of National Education Policy 2020 into measurable outcomes. At a time when many central universities across the Northeast were still preparing frameworks or initiating pilot phases, Manipur University advanced decisively, embedding key NEP provisions as early as the 2021-22 academic session.

This proactive approach, spearheaded by Vice-Chancellor Naorem Lokendra Singh, has positioned the university as a frontrunner in the region. With nearly 80 percent adoption of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and around 70 percent of its affiliated government colleges transitioning to the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP), the institution offers a compelling case study of policy execution under difficult circumstances.

**Early Adoption Amid Structural Challenges**

The Northeast presents a uniquely complex educational terrain. Issues such as geographic isolation, infrastructural deficits, faculty shortages, and periodic socio-political instability have historically slowed systemic reforms. In Manipur, prolonged ethnic tensions have further complicated academic continuity, often disrupting campus functioning and student mobility.

Yet, despite these structural constraints, Manipur University chose not to delay implementation. Instead, it embraced NEP 2020 at a stage when many institutions were still interpreting its framework. This early adoption proved crucial, allowing the university to build institutional momentum while others were catching up.

The appointment of Prof. Naorem Lokendra Singh in July 2021 marked a turning point. Within months of assuming office, he initiated structural changes aligned with NEP priorities—flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, credit mobility, and skill integration. Rather than treating NEP as a compliance exercise, the administration framed it as an opportunity to reimagine higher education in a conflict-prone, culturally rich region.

**Academic Bank of Credits: A Functional Shift**

A cornerstone of NEP 2020 is the Academic Bank of Credits, designed to enable students to accumulate, transfer, and redeem academic credits across institutions. While many universities struggled with the technical and administrative complexities of ABC integration, Manipur University moved quickly to operationalise the system.

The university registered with the ABC platform in 2021 itself, ensuring that credits earned from that academic session onward could be digitally stored in the National Academic Depository. The Academic Council formalised this shift, mandating departments to guide students in opening ABC accounts.

The results have been significant. Approximately 7,000 students are now actively registered on the ABC portal, while academic data for more than 70,000 students has been uploaded. These figures reflect not just compliance, but meaningful adoption—particularly in a region where students often face disruptions due to displacement or socio-political unrest.

The implications are far-reaching. With ABC, students can pause and resume education without losing academic progress, transfer credits between institutions, and explore interdisciplinary pathways. In fragile contexts like Manipur, such flexibility is not merely beneficial—it is essential.

Scaling the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme

Parallel to ABC implementation, Manipur University undertook a large-scale transition to the

Four-Year Undergraduate Programme. The FYUP framework, a key feature of NEP 2020, introduces

multiple entry and exit options, research components, and a broader interdisciplinary curriculum.

Managing this transition was particularly challenging given the university's extensive affiliating network of 129 colleges. Despite this administrative burden, nearly 70 percent of affiliated government colleges successfully adopted FYUP within a relatively short span.

This was made possible through revised ordinances, structured guidelines, and publicly accessible syllabi that ensured transparency. The university also engaged in continuous dialogue with affiliated colleges, addressing concerns related to curriculum design, faculty readiness, and infrastructure.

The early rollout has given Manipur University a distinct advantage over peer institutions. While some universities in the region introduced FYUP only in later academic cycles, Manipur University has already moved into a phase of refinement—addressing gaps in implementation and strengthening advanced components such as the Honours with Research track.

**Governance, Transparency, and Institutional Engagement**

One of the defining features of Manipur University's NEP journey has been its emphasis on transparency and stakeholder engagement. The administration has consistently communicated progress, challenges, and future plans through formal platforms.

In February 2023, the Vice-Chancellor presented a detailed progress report at a University Grants Commission (UGC)-chaired meeting of central university leaders. Such engagements not only highlighted the university's achievements but also opened channels for feedback and collaboration.

A notable milestone came on April 8, 2025, when the College Development Council organised an interactive session involving principals of affiliated colleges and UGC Secretary Manish R. Joshi. During this meeting, the university candidly discussed operational challenges, particularly in implementing the fourth-year research component, and sought collective solutions.

This openness has contributed to institutional trust and smoother policy adoption. Rather than presenting an image of flawless execution, the university has acknowledged constraints while demonstrating a willingness to adapt.

**Expanding Academic Horizons**

Beyond structural reforms, Manipur University has expanded its academic offerings in line with NEP's multidisciplinary vision. A five-year integrated Korean language programme reflects a growing emphasis on global engagement, particularly with East and Southeast Asia.

At the same time, vocational integration has been strengthened across disciplines. Courses in dance, music, and physical education have been redesigned to include skill-based components, while 71 value education courses and 12 skill development programmes have been introduced.

These initiatives signal a shift away from rote learning toward experiential and applied education. Regular faculty development programmes have supported this transition, equipping educators with the tools needed to deliver revised curricula.

**Equity, Inclusion, and Social Impact**  
NEP 2020 places strong emphasis on equity and inclusion—areas where Manipur University has made notable progress. The university has aligned its efforts with state-level initiatives such as the Chief Minister's College Students Rehabilitation Scheme, launched in 2023.

This programme supports nearly 5,000 students annually, many of whom come from vulnerable backgrounds. Its impact is visible in a reported 15 percent increase in Scheduled Tribe enrolment, along with improved retention rates.

Gender inclusion has also been prioritised, alongside multilingual support in Meitei and Naga dialects. These measures enhance accessibility, ensuring that higher education is not restricted by linguistic or socio-economic barriers.

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems  
A distinctive feature of Manipur University's NEP implementation is its approach

to Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). While many institutions have introduced IKS through electives or research centres, Manipur University has integrated it more deeply into undergraduate learning.

The establishment of a dedicated IKS centre, combined with regular faculty training programmes, has enabled meaningful curriculum integration. Courses incorporate elements of indigenous knowledge, performing arts, and local ecological practices.

In a culturally diverse region like the Northeast, such integration requires sensitivity. Manipur University has avoided a one-size-fits-all model, instead aligning IKS content with local traditions and lived experiences. This approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also enhances student engagement.

However, challenges remain. Standardising curricula, training faculty, and documenting oral traditions require sustained effort. The university's ongoing initiatives suggest a long-term commitment to addressing these gaps.

**Regional Comparison and Emerging Leadership**

When compared with other central universities in the Northeast, Manipur University's early adoption of NEP components stands out. Many institutions initiated substantial implementation only from 2022-23 onward, while some introduced key reforms like FYUP even later.

This head start has allowed Manipur University to move beyond initial adoption into consolidation and innovation. Higher ABC data uploads, extensive affiliating responsibilities, and consistent stakeholder engagement further reinforce its leadership position.

Importantly, this progress has been achieved in a context marked by instability and resource constraints. The university's ability to sustain reform momentum under such conditions underscores the importance of leadership, planning, and institutional commitment.

**The Road Ahead**

Despite significant progress, the journey is far from complete. Full activation of the Academic Bank of Credits—particularly enabling seamless credit transfers—remains a priority. Strengthening the Honours with Research track is another critical area, requiring enhanced faculty support and research infrastructure.

Aligning skill development courses with local economic sectors such as tourism, agriculture, handloom, and entrepreneurship will be essential for improving employability. The expansion of blended and digital learning platforms can further enhance accessibility, especially in remote areas.

There is also scope for greater regional collaboration. By sharing its experiences and best practices, Manipur University can support other institutions in the Northeast as they navigate NEP implementation.

**A Model of Contextual Reform**  
Manipur University's experience demonstrates that effective policy implementation is not merely about timelines or compliance metrics. It requires contextual adaptation—aligning national frameworks with local realities.

The university's emphasis on flexibility, inclusivity, cultural relevance, and skill development reflects a holistic understanding of NEP 2020. Its progress illustrates how higher education institutions in challenging environments can drive meaningful change through early action and sustained engagement.

For students, the impact is tangible. They now have access to a more flexible academic structure, opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, and pathways that connect education with livelihoods. The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems alongside vocational training ensures that learning remains both rooted and forward-looking.

**Conclusion**

As NEP 2020 continues to reshape India's higher education landscape, Manipur University offers a noteworthy example of what early, committed implementation can achieve. With 80 percent adoption of the Academic Bank of Credits and 70 percent transition to the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme, it has set a benchmark for the region.

The challenges it faces are real, but so is the progress it has made. By combining administrative resolve, academic innovation, and cultural sensitivity, the university has carved out a distinctive identity in the Northeast's educational ecosystem.

In doing so, it not only advances national policy goals but also reaffirms the transformative potential of higher education in regions often defined by their constraints.

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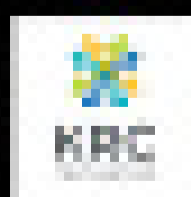


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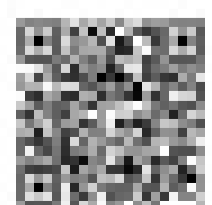


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